Quiet Resting Places

AND OTHER SERMONS

BY

ALEXANDER RALEIGH, D.D.
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PREFACE.

THESE Sermons have been drawn from the Author by the importunity of friends. He has been slow to yield to their desire, because he knows how much there is in a sermon which *cannot* be published. If it is true, it is "a building of God" for the time, "not made with hands;" and neither hands nor pens can preserve it. "The grace of the fashion of it perisheth," or survives only in the memory and life of the hearer. The elastic obedient words seem cooled and hardened on the printed page. Scarcely any attempt has been made to compensate in any way—by alteration of structure or addition of thought—for this inevitable loss. These Sermons were written for preaching in the ordinary course of the author's ministry, and they are now published nearly as they were written. This has been done advisedly, and the Author will achieve all he hopes and wishes, if

those who are kind enough to read them shall find in them any measure of that spiritual earnestness and simplicity which he desired and endeavoured after in the delivery of them.

The title of the book, taken from the sermon which happens to be first, will not be inappropriate, if in any degree they help to freshen or nourish divine life in the soul. May the Master himself use them as fuel for that sacred flame which is first kindled in the heart by his own matchless love, and which burns to immortality.

HIGHBURY NEW PARK,
November 1863.

DISCOURSES.

Quiet Resting-Places.

And in quiet resting-places.—ISAIAH xxxii. 18.

THIS prophecy was uttered in a time of *un*quietness. The Assyrian was expected with his invading army. The cloud of war was gathering dark on the horizon. Every thing portended trouble and distress—possible captivity and destruction. The people were looking eagerly for help, but it was the help of an arm of flesh. In this emergency the prophet-voice is heard —"Look not to Egypt but to God! The Assyrian will come, but his power shall be broken, and you shall still dwell in peace." Then looking still farther in his vision he foresees the captivity in Babylon, but also the return from it, a peaceable resettlement in Jerusalem, a time of religious revival, and continued safety even amid surrounding troubles.

But it is impossible to doubt that the vision of the prophet was extended into a far more illustrious future; and that now and again in describing those nearer

scenes he obtains and reveals glimpses of a higher glory, and refreshes his readers and himself with anticipations of Messiah's times. The closing verses of the chapter are full of the gospel, penetrated with the very spirit of evangelical peace. Hardly in the New Testament shall we find more intense or more beautiful expressions, and we see in them the very process by which individuals and communities now, are brought under the power of the truth, and into the enjoyment of spiritual rest—the pouring out of the Spirit from on high, the changing of wilderness into fruitful field, the workings of righteousness, the flowings of peace. "And my people shall dwell in a peaceable habitation, and in sure dwellings, and in quiet resting-places." "*My people*" seems to make the promise general, and to hold it out to us sealed with the "yea and amen" which is attached to every promise of God. "*Shall dwell*" seems to import some settled order of divine procedure; and, therefore, we are quite in the spirit of the text in asking what these resting-places are, where and how we may hope to find them, and how secure in them the promised sure abode.

Never perhaps has there been so much need of them in the world as now. If Solomon said in his day, "all things are full of labour," what would he say in ours? For how has the tide of human life risen since then? how has the stress of human toil increased? What an energy there is in things now! What an eagerness in

the human face! How fierce and keen are the conflicts of life! At deep midnight the roar of the city hardly sinks into stillness. The surging of the multitudes by day makes the individual heart quail; and hardly anywhere can one look or go to escape this fulness and fretfulness of life. The overflowings of the city swell up into mountain solitudes, the gaiety of the city is seen on summer days fluttering on what was once the quiet seashore—and "where shall rest be found; rest for the weary soul?" only within this sacred ground, only in some of these quiet resting-places which God makes and keeps for his pilgrim people. He gives them no exemption from the *outward* strife. The sweat of toil is on their brow. They are covered with the dust of conflict. They rise early and sit up late. In all the labour of this unresting world they have a full share; but they have that inward calm which God gives them only to know. They have soul-quietness for city strife. They have heart-assurance to compensate for worldly fluctuations. In divine love and presence they find a "sure dwelling" even while moving without any stay through the days and scenes of their earthly history; and all along the way by which they go, be that way in itself rough or smooth, there are "quiet resting-places."

In eastern countries, where the habit of hospitality is stronger than with us, the traveller is sometimes surprised and regaled by much-needed but unexpected

wayside comforts. Yonder husbandman who is now a-field at his work was here in the early morning to leave by the wayside that pitcher of water that the passing traveller might drink. This clump of trees which makes a thick and welcome "shadow from the heat," was planted by one who expected neither fame nor money for his toil, and who now lies in a nameless grave. Hands now mouldering in dust scooped out this cool seat in the rock. Some "Father Jacob gave us this well after drinking thereof himself, and his children, and his cattle." Travellers from the west are much affected by such instances of pure humanity and unselfish kindness. And yet these are but feeble types, mere dim shadows of *divine* thoughtfulness and care. The heavenly benefactor comes down in preventing loving-kindness upon the earthly pathway of his people. He foreknows, forecasts, foreruns. We think of Jesus as forerunner of his people only "within the veil." In a sense not less true he is their forerunner along the journey of every day. We cannot be up so early that he has not been waking before us. We cannot run so fast that he has not far outstripped our speed. Our to-morrow is his yesterday. He is with us and yet before us. He has said at one place and another, "they are to pass this way; I will leave these helps for them; I will smooth down the over-ruggedness of life, so that they shall get through; I will open rivers for them in high

places, and streams in the midst of the desert; and for the ever-recurring weariness of life, for its toil and conflict, heat and trouble, they shall have *quiet resting-places.*"

I.

The Evening.—The close of each day should bring over the soul some shadow of solemnity and rest. A sacred time even in Eden was "the cool of the day." Isaac went out into the field to meditate "at eventide." Jesus often left his disciples about sundown, and wandered up among the Syrian hills to find some sequestered spot where he might feel himself alone in the full presence of God. The breeze that fanned the leaves of Paradise will touch our cheek, and make coolness at the close of our day, if we will but cease from care and sin. The same sun shines and sets on us which lightened and left the patriarchs day by day so long ago. The same night shadows us that gathered around the Saviour of the world. And the same soul-rest will be ours if we seek it "when even is now come."

We read in the Scriptures that day and night are the "ordinances" of God. Can any one suppose that he has established them for only *material* ends? To preserve the balance of the heavens, to promote the growth of vegetables, to give sleeping time to man? Those are ends every way worthy of God, but surely a higher end is found in the trial, nurture, and purification of *souls.*

The day is for their labour; the night is for their rest. The day is full of hard tests and severe exactions; the night soon returns all soft and dewy with refreshing again. This is not so by necessity. Alas! there are thousands of busy men who pass this "quiet resting-place" and never see it. They seem not to know that it is "the shadow of the Almighty," the silent footstep of his nearer presence. But to many a one the evening is a daily deliverance and salvation, a time of refreshing from the presence of the Lord. And is there any sufficient reason to make the evening not so much to you? If God has placed you so in his providence that you *cannot* have it in quietness for meditation and prayer, then he will compensate you for the loss. You shall be no loser by doing your duty. He will nourish your soul by other means, and give you rest in other ways. There are not a few who are in this predicament, to whom the evening is but the prolongation of the day; who *must*, in strength or weariness hold on at the task until it is done; who must, late as well as early, stand in their place or see it taken by another. Ah, but think! Is it certain that this is your case? Rather, has not God to a large extent put the matter into your own hands, and *you* are arranging it so. *You* are killing each evening as it comes, shutting out its softness by unnecessary toil, startling its silence with music, spending it, as the phrase is, always in company. By your

present plan of life you may be getting much, but are you not losing more? You are enriched, as you hope for good, by the gains of your trade; pleased and informed with the conversation of the friends you meet; solaced and stimulated by the sweet strains you hear. But the evening will not thus be a "quiet resting-place," will not come to your heart with whisperings of the far-off world to which you are going, with airs from the better country, with soft-falling dews of heaven. Fitly, therefore, we may ask you to think, whether it would not be well at least to intersperse labour and social delights with seasons of calm reflection? For you have to remember that God will not compensate you in his providence for what you thus wilfully lose. You can make quietness if you will for a longer or a shorter time at the close of the day. You can make, as it were, a little inclosure of time within which your soul shall have a deeper thoughtfulness and a more conscious rest. Behold! God himself makes that enclosure for you; you have only to enter it. He draws you away from toil; he drops the twilight upon your path, and then shadows you with the wing of night. And as the sun is setting, as the air grows cool, and as the night draws on, how temple-like are earth and sky! How near is the great presence! Hear you not then the still small voice—softer than sound of brooks, more musical than summer wind among the

leaves—calling you to come into higher relations and holier life? To a devout soul the evening is like "the secret place of the most high." It is "the shadow of the Almighty." It is a closet of which God builds the walls and shuts to the door. It is a quiet resting-place in which the soul may soothe weariness, recruit strength, look on the face of purity, and grow up into the image of God.

Think, then, as the evening comes round—for thought is the soul's rest—think of the day that is gone with gratitude, for every hour of it has been overflowing with the goodness of God; with penitence, for you will easily discover that it has been a day of shortcomings and sins; with wisdom, aiming to understand it better than when you lived it; with tenderness and holy fear, as feeling how good and how grand a thing it is to be permitted to live on, and to hope to live better.

Think of to-morrow which will come so soon, with its unknown and yet probable events—of the task that will await you then; of the persons who will be around you, of their words, their looks, their influence; of the peril you will have to brave; of the weakness you will feel; of the strength you will need; of the failure you fear, that by your thought and prayer it may be the less likely to come; and of the goodness which will certainly enrich and crown to-morrow as it has filled and now closes to-day.

Think of the evening of life itself; of the vanishing of all mortal things; of the shadow that death will cast; of the soul's departure through that mysterious shade; of the morning on the other side, of the sunless city, the cloudless skies, the stormless shores, the happy multitudes, the swelling songs, the wonder, the rapture, and the rest. Think any such thoughts with prayer and faith, and your soul *must* be lifted at least somewhat above the dust and drudgery of this vexing and down-dragging world; must be drawn away from its cares and defilements; and as you grow stronger and happier among these superior things you will say gladly, "The Saviour has led me to-night into one of his quiet resting-places: this is the rest and this is the refreshing wherewith he causeth the weary to rest."

II.

The Sabbath is a "quiet resting-place." In the beginning God rested from his work, and blessed and hallowed the day for all time, and never has there been a Sabbath on earth in which men have not been entering into the very rest of God. Like all his gifts it has been much perverted. To some it has been only dark bondage—a day on which the "heavy burdens" have become heavier still. To others it has been a day for license and frivolity—the worst, and not the best of the seven. To most on earth, alas! it is little or nothing

different from other days. But believing and penitential souls greet the first day of the week with fear and great joy. Amid the toils and cares of the other days, many of them long for its coming round, and to them it returns with a brightness caught from the heaven out of which it seems to have rolled; with a calmness drawn from the Sabbath of eternity which it types; with a healing put into it by the hand of the Physician of Souls. Hail to the Sabbath day! God's selectest gift of time! man's highest opportunity! mount of clearest vision! land of purest air! spot nearest heaven's gate!

If the history of but one Christian Sabbath day could be truly written, it would be the most glad surprising history that was ever penned. Angels would read it with rapt attention, and saints would wonder more than they now do, that so much of heaven in one day can descend upon the earth. That history would tell us of sins, that had been gathering and blackening for years "blotted out," and clean gone for ever! of hearts that had been hardening into worldliness, touched and softened with grace as the land is made soft with showers! of mountain-cares rolled away, and cast into the depths of the sea! of the most distressing fears dispersed as if they had never been! of triumphs of faith far and near! of sweet communings of ten thousand souls with heaven! It would tell us of peace in the cottage, humility in the palace, prayer in the glen, light

in the prison! of hearts burning by the way at the felt presence of Jesus; of sanctuaries filled with the glory of the Lord; of fresh hopes kindled within the gloom of despondency; of spiritual ruins built up into living temples; of dry bones of the valley changed into armies of living men; of the region of the shadow of death invaded and brightened with the bloom of the morning! It would reveal to our wondering sight Jacob's mystic ladder, with the busy angels making an upward and a downward stream of light. Haply we might behold above it the most sacred form in the universe—the person of the exalted Saviour enshrined amid the glories of heaven, yet looking and bending still with a Saviour's love and longing to the earth, and giving charge to ten thousand "ministering spirits" to speed fast and far by land and sea to "minister for them who shall be the heirs of salvation." The history of the mightiest empires, as written by man, would fade into moral insignificance when compared with the history of one Sabbath day. And, what is to our present purpose, through all this varied experience would run the one pervading element of *rest*. For all true religion is full of rest. Sin is discordancy, irritation, repulsion, war! Religion is harmony, unity, peacefulness; in one word, it is coming into rest with God. It is indeed full of action and effort, strength and joy; but activity and rest are near of kin. It is life, but life in health and not in disease; life in

freedom, not amid irritating restrictions; from first to last there is a divine calmness in it; "the peace of God keeps the heart and mind through Jesus Christ;" with the energies of wakefulness are mingled the felicities of repose. So that to spend a Sabbath well is of necessity to make it "a peaceable habitation, a sure dwelling, *a quiet resting-place.*" May our Sabbath ever be so to us! When we cease from labour and business, as happily in this country we may, let us cease also from care, and anxiousness, and sinful fears! Let us undo the heavy burdens from our hearts, and break every inward yoke, and let the oppressed go free! We have high business on hand to-day! We have to think the thoughts of God, to reciprocate the love of Christ, and thus to gird ourselves afresh for the journey home! Come, let us read again these blessed letters sent to us from that far country. Let us listen that we may hear its voices! Let us be disengaged and waiting for the breathing of its airs, for the binding of its sympathies, for the soft, sweet thrillings of its purifying, all-reconciling love. Are we children? then let us gather together in filial spirit within this house of refreshing which every week our Father builds for us by the way. Are we heirs? then let us talk to each other of our "inheritance, which is incorruptible and undefiled, and which fadeth not away." Have we the earnest already? then in this "quiet resting-place" among the days, let us look at that also, and

ask him who gave it to make it brighter still, to keep it as fresh within us as the inheritance to which it points —a rich, full antepast of the everlasting rest.

III.

The providential change may be of such a character as to lead us at once into a "quiet resting-place," prepared for us by him who brings the evening and the Sabbath in their season. It may be a change of locality, or of occupation, or of condition. We are in the habit of saying, that change of place is not change of mind. In the deepest sense, no doubt, this is true, and yet a considerable change is produced, sometimes, in the state of the mind, simply by moving from one place to another. The ascent of a high mountain lays not only the valleys and lesser hills far beneath us, but also cares and toils, and even some of the more serious responsibilities of human life. For the brief hour of our stay we are etherialized. We forget yesterday, and take no thought for to-morrow. We get back, then, some of the pure simplicity of childhood; we draw down something of the angelic life. No recorded death is more sublime than that of Moses on the lone mountain top.

According to our modern habits there is now, in this respect, to very many a changing time of the year. During the summer and autumn months, the city sheds itself over the land. Care-worn men go far and wide, by

upland and mountain height, by glen, and forest, and sea: And sometimes the effect of a change like this is wonderful upon the animal nature, and upon what we call "the spirits." The breeze of the heathery hills kindles the languid eye, and flushes the pale cheek. The stillness and solitude of the shore are sweet in contrast with the heavings of crowded city life. But are we to seek for nothing higher? Does the Ruler of Providence release the young man only that he may get muscular power, and keen sensation, and the recruiting of wasted energy, and then return to spend this property in more vigorous worldliness? Does he give the mother these weeks of precious rest by the sea, that she may the better lead the fashion, and shew her daughters how to devote themselves at the all-consuming shrine? Rather, does not God say as clearly as his providence can speak the words, "This is a quiet resting-place for *the soul* as well as for the body and the mind. Here recruit the *inmost* strength. Drink here of the living streams. Inhale the purest air. See light in God's light, and all things else more truly by its means. Gaze over the sea of time. Look up to the mountains of eternity. Let your soul be all refreshed and purified in this quiet resting-place, which I have prepared for you in your progress to another world."

Any considerable providential change has something of the same character. An infant is born, and in his

first sleep sheds through the house something of the solemnity of being. A child is "recovered of his sickness," in which the little pilgrim seemed to be wandering away from all your care and love. A son has gone out to a foreign land. A daughter has been married. Any thing that breaks the continuity, that alters the relationships, that makes a pause in life—an open space in the forest of its toils and cares—any thing of that kind is God's voice, saying, "Here is relief for you. Enter this quiet resting-place which my hand has made. Come in! Come in! Wherefore standest thou without? By thought recollect yourself. By faith recover yourself. By prayer strengthen yourself for the way, the work, and the warfare which are before you still.

Or, let the change be from health to sickness, then the "quiet resting-place" is made in the retirement of the chamber, or the "stillness" of the bed. If the illness is sufficient to interrupt the ordinary occupation, and yet *not* so severe as to prevent the exercise of reflection, the season may be a very precious one. The soul, by entering into its "closet," and abiding for a while in "stillness," throws off the burning fever and comes out "restored" into more wholesome ways. When the trouble is more severe, however, we find it hard to think of the soul reaching any resting-place until it is over. We see tossings to and fro until the dawning of the day. We hear the sufferer's wail, we see the watcher's tears,

but nothing that betokens rest. Yes; but down in the soul's depths that rest is coming in. God's thoughts are settling there; God's spirit is working there. There the Saviour at times is revealing himself, amid fears and disquietudes, as he did on the night of the storm to his disciples, and that soul is unspeakably comforted by hearing the old assurance, which only he can give, "Be of good cheer, it is I, be not afraid." *This* resting-place is sometimes made for a man who has passed all the others we have named without seeing them, and *because* he has not seen them, or at any rate has not filled his heart with their serenities. The Evening has not cooled his spirit—the Sabbath has not much allayed the fever of life. Other changes have been to him like swift-passing clouds—birth, marriage, death, all these have been in his family, and he has been something the better of them; but still his life is too full of haste and mere mortal eagerness. Perhaps there is a vigorous outwardness about it, but the fountains within are languid and low. The sickness comes, that these fountains may be purified and filled. As we look at the process, we call it "sore trouble." But beneath the physical anguish and the mental fear, the soul herself is entering into sanctuary, subsiding into rest. Blessed process, that cleanses the heart from sin—that breaks the despotism of secularities—that lifts the spiritual high above the carnal, and lays all this visible life under "the

powers of the world to come." Stand by a bed of sanctified affliction, and look upon the weary, wasting sufferer—you are like one standing by a fountain of sweet water that has been troubled to its depths by the rod in the hand of the purifier. Let him wait a little; the mud and scum will float away, and he will see his image in the pure translucent well. So Christ waits and looks into that troubled heart, for he knows it will be untroubled soon, and that he will discover then, in its far depths, the clear reflection of his own divine image.

IV.

The grave is a quiet resting-place. "There the prisoners rest together; they hear not the voice of the oppressor. The small and great are there, and the servant is free from his master. There the wicked cease from troubling, and there the weary be at rest." This is man's "*long home.*" Other homes are but like calling-places, in which the wayfaring man tarries for a few days and nights in pursuing the great journey; but in this "long home" "man lieth down and riseth not, till the heavens be no more; they shall not awake nor be raised out of their sleep." "Oh that thou wouldest hide me in the grave, that thou wouldest keep me secret (as in a quiet resting-place) until thy wrath be past; that thou wouldest appoint me a set time and remember me!" Sweet and restful will the grave seem to us if

God, in calling us to it, appoints us a set time, and gives us his covenant promise of remembrance.

It may perhaps be the power of association more than the reality of the thing, but have you not sometimes felt that there is no earthly quiet so profound as that of a country churchyard. I have such a place in view—one among many I have seen—a sweet sequestered spot away among the hills. Those hills stand around in silence, watching. A river flows by, and seems to hush its waters just in passing, lest it should disturb the sleepers. There are trees, but they too seem to be in the secret, for they have a fashion of making soft and melancholy music with the evening wind, or else they stand in calm voiceless grief. Nature seems to concentrate her pathos and her stillness in such a spot. Quiet is the dust below—quiet the scarcely-moving grass of the graves—quiet the shadows of the tomb-stones—quiet the overarching sky; and he who sits there on the mouldering stone, looking at the graves of his kindred, is thinking, "It *is* a quiet resting-place; I shall not be sorry when the toils of this life are over, and wearied I come in hither to lay me down among the rest. I shall be glad rather when the sowing and the reaping are done, and I am brought here, like as a shock of corn cometh in in his season." "A picture like this is the result of imagination" you are ready to say. No doubt, in part it is; but imagination in such

a case is ruled by the Christian faith. It is not our mere human fancy that invests the burial-place of the Christian dead with such a sacred charm, that wraps it thus as in the peace and silence of God. It is Christ who thus hallows the grave. He has been a sleeper there; he has taken the harshness, the disquietude, the terror away. From that rock-tomb on Calvary "where the Lord lay," a light has been shed into every Christian's grave, and thence has flowed that sweet tranquillity which seems now to hover about all the places where his people lie at rest. It is therefore not an exercise of our fancy, but a rational and great triumph of our faith, when we can divest death of its natural terrors, and the grave of its cold repulsiveness—surrounding it with richer and happier associations. It is not now the gloomy portal to a dark unknown world. It is not now in the devil's keeping; it is the property of Christ, one of the homes of his people—a quiet resting-place, where, after the fever and toil of these mortal days, they may lie in stillness for a little while, until he prepares another home, another quiet resting-place, the last, the best of all—in heaven.

V.

Heaven is the quietest resting-place of all. Ere the inferior, the unconscious part of the man is laid in the grave, the nobler, the immortal part, has gone to the last,

the perfect rest, which remaineth for the people of God. Of that resting-place we can know little or nothing here. We know much in general, but nothing exactly. We are consoled and strengthened by the assurance that it will be perfect rest; but of what elements it will be composed, and what the enjoyment of it will be, we must wait to know. We look with sin-clouded eye towards its beautiful serenities. We speak of its calm raptures with stammering tongue. It lies not only beyond the bounds of earth, but so far beyond our earthly experiences that we can hardly even *imagine* what it will be. The stillest evening never shed *its* calm around us. The most blissful Sabbath day never lifted the worshipper within reach of the outermost wave of its rapture. The happiest change of life never yet brought mortal within sight of the placid shore, or within hearing of the perfect harmonies. The path to it no fowl knoweth, and the vulture's eye hath not caught its most distant gleam. It is hid from the eyes of all living, and kept close from the fowls of the air. Destruction and death say we have heard the fame thereof with our ears. God understandeth the way thereof, and he knoweth the place thereof. Let that be enough for us. Christ will prepare it, and to all who are prepared for it will in due time secure its everlasting enjoyment. The preparation for it will be achieved in the diligent use of the other resting-places which are opened to us as we pass on our way.

In the meditation of the Evening, in the worship of the Sabbath, in thoughtfulness amid change, in patience under trouble, and in the last sweet sleep of the grave, our preparation will be completed for that rest which will be rapture, and for that glory which will crown all earthly grace.

After all that has been said, we need one great complemental truth, which is this—that we do not find our true rest in *places* at all, but only in *persons*. The living soul must have a living portion. Men think they live in places and among things. They live really among persons. What were the fairest prospect if a man were condemned to behold it for ever alone? What the most gorgeous palace if he must hear no footstep but his own treading the splendid but deserted rooms? What even the higher things of this human life, the duties and the interests, and the struggles, if there were not intermingled with them all a sense of the nearness of other human beings, and if there were not the continual reciprocal action of those affections and sympathies which make life so sacred and dear? But no human being, no assemblage of human beings, can meet the wants and fulfil the longings of even one human soul. It is better to live among persons than among things. Only a mean man—a miser, a misanthrope, or a coward—will stay among things; but we may live among persons and *yet* come short of the ultimate and perfect rest. Ah, yes! if we live *only* among ourselves, there will still be an

inner silence—"a darkness that may be felt." The heart of many a one who is crowned with social gifts, and surrounded with friendly faces and helping hands, waits still and listens, and says, "I have not heard the glad tidings yet!" No; you have not indeed, if you have been living *only* among human beings, however precious and dear, only among humanities, however tender and true. Your heart is waiting, and aching while it waits, for an infinite sympathy, for an everlasting strength, for a grace that will cancel sin and restore purity, in one word, for the love of God; for the love of God in Christ. And He stands this day ready to welcome you into the everlasting rest. All the resting-places we have been trying to describe *are his*. He alone can give you the sweetest peace of the evening hour. He is Lord of the Sabbath, ruler of change, Saviour from trouble, guardian of the grave, proprietor of heaven; and in these you will find true rest *only* as you find it in *him*—the rest of a penitent, faithful, loving heart. We leave with you, then, his own divine words, and no words of ours shall follow them, for indeed they are high and wonderful words—kingly, solemn, loving, pure, richer than gold, fairer than beauty, sweeter than song, and better worth the telling over this wide earth among toiling and suffering men, than all the other news which fly abroad from tongues, and pens, and books—"Come unto me all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest!"

The Dew.

I will be as the dew unto Israel.—HOSEA xiv. 5.

THIS is a gracious promise to a penitent and returning people. Israel had "fallen by her iniquity;" but "he who pardoneth iniquity, transgression, and sin" had earnestly exhorted her to arise and return by repentance and righteousness to himself; to "take with her words" of humble confession, of earnest entreaty, of renewed covenant engagement, of grateful loving trust, and of solemn vow and promise for the future. And it is on the supposition that that gracious exhortation has been laid to heart, and that the great work of religious repentance has begun that the Lord comes forth with abundant and adapted promises, among which we find *this* promise which we are now to consider, "I will be as the dew unto Israel."

In some eastern countries the dew falls much more copiously than it ever does with us, and vegetation is much more dependant on its coming. In Palestine the heat of summer is very intense, and for months together there are no rains to cool the air and refresh the earth. During that time every thing would be withered and parched but for the nightly abundance of the refreshing

dew. There is a space of time in the very height of summer when even the dew almost fails, but it is abundant for some time after "the former rains," and it begins to abound again some time before the descent of "the latter rains." It hardly need be said that it is of the greatest value to all who are engaged in agricultural pursuits. It assuages the fierce drought of the season. With its nightly baptism it invigorates the languid vegetation, and renews greenness and growth over the whole landscape.

"I will be as the dew unto Israel." *As* the dew: there must then be some points of analogy between the descent of the dew upon the ground, and the gracious comings and manifestations of God to his people; and we may hope that it will contribute somewhat to our instruction and help if we now endeavour to discover and describe them. "*As* the dew."

I.

The dew falls very quietly and gently. On the tempestuous night there is none. If the waves are chafing the shore, if the winds are howling among the trees, if clouds are hurrying across the sky, there is no descent of dew. It is distilled beneath serene heavens. Its crystal drops are formed under the wing of silence and in the bosom of the quiet night.

So is God to his people when he comes to revive

and bless them. He does not usually come amid agitations and excitements, in the stress of life, in the hurry of affairs, in the crash of startling events. He will not *forsake* those who are putting their trust in him in any scenes and experiences through which they are called in his providence to pass. He will go with them to the forefront of the hottest battle of this life. They shall "go in the strength of the Lord God, making mention of his righteousness." Their strength shall be renewed, their arms upheld, their way directed. But in all such active and busy experience there is rather the *spending* than the getting of strength. If the soul is like the body it could not stand perpetual strain and waste. There must be times of recruiting and replenishment, and these will probably be times of silence. The filling of the hidden springs, the growing of the secret inward strength, will be, the "man knoweth not how;" as is the growing of the flowers, as is the falling of the dew!

Elijah went forth from his cave in Horeb, and stood on the mount before the Lord. And behold a great and strong wind rent the mountains, and brake in pieces the rocks before the Lord; but the Lord was not in the wind: and after the wind an earthquake, but the Lord was not in the earthquake; and after the earthquake a fire, but the Lord was not in the fire; and after the fire, *a still small voice.* And when Elijah heard *that*, he wrapped his face in his mantle and went out and stood

in the entering in of the cave, and waited for divine presence and communications. Wind! Earthquake! Fire! these are nature's strongest and most appalling things; but they are not the chosen symbols of God's nearness and grace. The wind can break ships in pieces; it can unroof palaces and send towers toppling to the dust; it can awaken ten thousand sleepers, and make savage beasts crouch close in their dens. The earthquake can swallow the living city, and spread telegraphic terror over a wide continent as it stirs its subterranean forces, and then rocks and sobs itself to rest. The fire can sweep over the face of the prairie, destroying every living thing; in one night it can lay the forest of a hundred miles in ashes. The still small voice, how weak a thing *it* seems in comparison with these tremendous agents! And yet *this* is the chosen symbol of God's nearness as the God of grace. He will speak to us in the still small voice. "He will be as the dew unto Israel."

We must not forget that there are times in the Church's history, and blessed times too, when God comes graciously near amid agitations and alarms, when he descends as in the rushing of pentecostal wind, when he moves the common heart as with the shaking of an earthquake, when he sheds his presence among men like a spreading fire. At intervals, during the whole history of the Church, there have been those

sudden and majestic comings of God. He has come down as through "rent heavens." He has stood as upon "flowing mountains." His enemies have trembled at his presence, while his friends have fallen in humility and adoration at his feet. It would seem that such striking interpositions are needful at intervals, to rebuke the world's selfishness and to quicken the Church's life. When such "a season of refreshing" is given, surely every devout heart must thrill with the enlarging joy it brings, and behold with grateful wonder "the way of the Spirit." But, after all, such comings of God have hitherto been exceptional. God's gracious work has gone on in sublime quietness. He has been "as the dew unto Israel." He has come down "as the rain upon the mown grass, as the small rain upon the tender herb." Many a true religious revival has been accomplished in much quietness, without any tremendous agonies or sublime raptures, without swift alternations of hope and fear—just by a growing sense of the nearness and importance of divine things. Indeed, we never can be sure of the reality and worth of any religious excitement, which we hope is a true revival, until it issues and lives in the regularities of grace—in the settled quietness of peace and love. The unusual agitations that attend such a revival are the means and not the end. The end is a continuing goodness—acts and fruits of holiness filling all the life. Now, it seems to

be a law of God, that the noblest fruits of goodness in a human soul and character are ripened *slowly*. The lapse of many days; the smiling and the shadowing of a various providence; acts of will, judgment, memory, hope, choice, without number; and silent workings of the Spirit of God in all, and by means of all—the whole of what we call the experience of life—is necessary to bring the richest and fullest harvest on a human soul. The seed of grace "groweth up men know not how." They sleep and wake, and work and rest, and it groweth up, "first the blade, then the ear, then the full corn in the ear." "I will be as the dew unto Israel;" *that* falls night after night, and so softly that the quickest ear cannot hear the motion, and so imperceptibly, that the quickest eye cannot detect the delicate process of its formation. Yet it comes to every leaf, to every blade of grass, to every growing thing; and when the morning dawns, the whole landscape is wet with the glittering wealth. "Thy people shall be willing in the day of thy power, in the beauties of holiness from the womb of the morning: thou hast the dew of thy youth." Let us then seek God and wait for his coming, not amid excitements and agitations, but in thoughtfulness and silence, in morning meditation, in evening prayer, in a more intense and believing use of the means at hand, in more constant and more vigorous endeavours to reach and realize a still better life than the one we lead. In this

way, without provoking hostile criticism, without attracting any undesirable notice, without putting forth any perilous profession of sanctity, from which, to our own shame, and the discouragement of others, we might fall away, we shall turn form into substance, get strength from all outward things, shine, without ourselves knowing how serenely, in the beauties of holiness, and have the dews of grace over the whole field of our life. Do not wait for "a rushing mighty wind." Do not look for "cloven tongues as of fire." Open your heart for the descending dew. Believe in God's nearness. Rest in God's love. Stand still and see his salvation. To how many among us might the Apostle's injunction be appropriately given, but in a new sense—"Study to be quiet!" Dismiss the haste from your life! Abate the fever of it. Check its hurried strivings. Cast from your heart its corroding cares. Take time! Take time! See! you are passing precious opportunities. You are like to shatter precious things. Take time to think, to believe, to pray. There is no hurry. Let there be the profoundest earnestness but no haste. You have an eternity of being. You are living for evermore. And God is calling you to live in his calmness and to rest in his eternal love. He is waiting for the opening of your heart in the hour of quietness, that he may distil over all its affections the sweet baptism of his grace, that he may "be as the dew unto Israel."

II.

The dew falls very copiously.—In the land of Israel much more abundantly than it ever does in this country. Gideon wrung out of his fleece in the morning a bowlful of water. There was nothing miraculous in the quantity. The miracle was in the dew coming *only* upon the fleece while all the ground was dry. The quantity was only such as still falls in the valleys and on the hill-sides of Palestine. Travellers tell us that after a still night, when the dew has been falling, they find their baggage and their tents dripping as though it had been heavy rain during the night. Indeed, a light dew would be of little service. It must be copious, to keep nature fresh and living during the summer months. "*I will be as the dew unto Israel.*" God's grace to a church in a time of spiritual quickening is very copious and full. When hearts are opened to him in expectation, they never close again in collapse and disappointment. A fulness comes to them which supplies for the time "all their need." This makes the feeling of growth in religion delightful. It is not a part of the nature merely which is growing. It is the whole "new man in Christ Jesus" building itself up into the strength and beauty of a living growth. When God touches a soul with his gracious fulness immediately there are streamings of life through it all. No doubt one part of

the nature may somewhat outgrow another in the great development of grace, but this inequality or inharmoniousness can never be so great that there shall be fulness in the understanding and starvation in the heart, readiness in the will and reluctancy among the affections, a growing faith but a love waxing cold—one part of the nature raised, and another part left in depression and darkness. No; God's dealings are with the whole soul of a man. He touches and feeds with his grace *all* that is within us, and in responsive life and gladness "all that is within us is stirred up to take hold of God and to bless his holy name."

A man can find this engagement of his whole nature only in religion. Let him addict himself to the culture of some branch of philosophy, he becomes in that department learned and wise in proportion to his diligence; or to the culture of any of the arts, and he may possibly grow more polished and tasteful; or to the discharge of the higher social duties, and to the measure of his effort he becomes philanthropic and good. But the philosopher may be a man of low principle. The artist may have cold feelings. The philanthropist may be a man of little information, or of partial goodness. Men can live in these separate spheres and not feel the one acting on the other. And if a man were so versatile and powerful as to gather them all in the grasp of his attainment, his religious faculties might be still asleep, and the noblest

part of his nature be the lowest down and the most neglected. But such is the dominating and fulfilling power of religion, that it is impossible to grow religiously better without having some of the living influence shed through every part. It is impossible for a soul to hold believing and loving concourse with God without gaining enrichment in all the nature, without drawing some streams from the divine abundance through every part of the life; for he hath said that he "will supply all our need," that he "will withhold no good thing," that he "will be as the dew unto Israel."

You may not strongly *feel* that this is so. But it is so. It must be so, in conformity with the laws of the case. For "He that seeketh findeth," and if you are really seeking to have life in God and to "have it more abundantly," then unquestionably you are getting it "more abundantly," according to the measure and strength of your seeking. You are "growing like a cedar in Lebanon." You are "flourishing in the courts of our God." You are "planted by the rivers of water." You will "bring forth fruit in your season. Your leaf also shall not wither, and whatsoever you do," while you continue in this mind, "shall prosper." For God will not slacken and draw off his fulness. *He* will never be unfaithful to his covenant. He will "meet him who rejoiceth and worketh righteousness, those that remember him in his ways." He "will be as the dew unto Israel."

This copiousness of divine influence is seen not only in this wholeness of effect upon the individual, but also in its diffusion over the whole Christian community—"I will be as the dew *unto Israel.*" There is reason to think that this living influence from God, very seldom, hardly ever, comes down upon one in a Christian community or upon a few, without affecting in a corresponding measure all the rest. Gideon's fleece was wet and all the ground was dry, but that was a miracle. Again, Gideon's fleece was dry and all the ground was wet, but that also was a miracle. God's dew does not come in streams. It is distilled from all the air. It lies clear and cool on every growing thing. And God's grace in like manner comes to *many* hearts. It runs from heart to heart by the chain of sympathy. It seeks to embrace *all* with its binding atmosphere of love. Men are affected together in other things. In war, in politics, in all the active scenes of social life the principle of sympathy prevails in a very large degree. God honours and uses the same principle of our nature in religion, and when he comes notably in his grace, it is seldom to *one* only, or to a very few—the influence is spread more widely, until sometimes none are left unaffected. This makes the Christian fellowship at such times a precious and fruitful thing. When all come to feel and strive together each is borne on more powerfully in his individual way. "Behold how good and how pleasant it is for brethren

to dwell together in unity! It is like the precious ointment upon the head, that ran down upon the beard, even Aaron's beard; that went down to the skirts of his garments. As the dew of Hermon, and as the dew that descended upon the mountains of Zion: for there the Lord commands the blessing, even life for evermore."

III.

The dew is very refreshing. It makes dying nature live. At the close of the hot summer day she is languid and pulseless, and ready to perish. The ground is parched. The leaves are shrunken. The flowers keep back their sweetest fragrance, and hide their richest colours. The husbandman looks despondingly over his fields, and fears for the safety of his growing corn. But then begins the silent copious baptism with the dew. All night long it is continued; and in the morning nature's face is wet and yet radiant with the refreshing visitation. Now the lily is lifting its head, and the rose is putting on its bloom, and the grassy field has a more lustrous green, and the corn looks fresh and well, and the farmer can think with hope of the coming harvest day. "I will be as the dew unto Israel." When God comes in fulfilment of this promise there is a recovery of sinking strength, a rekindling of dying graces, a returning to "first love," a doing of first works. To those who are so visited there is a newness

in religion every day. Sacred things become more sacred, and nothing is "common;" the whole of life is joyously felt to be an accepted thing with God through Jesus Christ. "Times of refreshing from the presence of the Lord" are eminently characteristic of the Christian economy, and nothing is more characteristic of a prosperous Christian experience than a frequent renewal of this feeling of refreshment. We may be quite unable to analyze or trace the process of thought and feeling by which this consciousness is produced, but if it *is* produced in us—a clear bright consciousness of being better in spiritual life than we were, more in God and less in ourselves—then there is some fulfilment of the Apostle's prediction, a "time of refreshing" has come to us, and of the promise of the text, "I will be as the dew unto Israel." You say you cannot remember what you have read in the book, or what you have heard in the ear. All seems to pass from you with the fleeting moments when you are engaged in the exercise, and you mourn as for some lost treasure. But what have you lost? If you caught into your soul the *sentiment* of the book while reading it; if you inhaled the *spirit* of the sermon while it was being preached, then have you secured what is best in both. The feeling of refreshment you have is the token that your soul has had repast and nourishment, and that God has been "as the dew unto Israel." We do not say that remembrance of

what has been read or heard is altogether immaterial. Thoughts which are true and good, and which are in any way peculiarly adapted to your individual state, are well worth remembrance and review; and if they are escaping you through a mere intellectual sluggishness, by want of that fixed attention which you can and do give to other things, then you are right in lamenting the loss you are sustaining, and you will be yet more right in earnestly seeking a remedy, which, in such case, can be found only in giving a deeper and more fixed attention to divine things, in order that there may be a deeper and more abiding impress on the memory. But if you are doing all that you can, if any increase of intellectual effort would abate or mar the spiritual enjoyment, never hesitate which you shall have. Let the letter go; cling to the spirit. Mourn not for the vanishing of the forms, if you can hold and keep in your heart something of the living substance they enshrined. Saul could not tell *how* it was that that fair minstrel boy had such a power with his harp to soothe his most vexing thoughts, and to roll away the clouds from his gloomy spirit. But he knew well that *so* it was; and always when the darkness was returning that minstrel came again with his harp, and "played with his hand." "So Saul was refreshed and was well, and the evil spirit departed from him." The evil spirit of this world is ever invading us again, trying

to fetter our affections to things below, and to cover the overspreading heavens with the clouds of care and toil; and if any one—minstrel boy or aged harper—can so touch the harp of truth with his fingers that these gathering clouds shall break up at the sound, and the bound affections shall snap their fetters, and rise to meet the music and swell the song, we need not curiously inquire how it has been done; or, at any rate, it may be enough for us to remember that it is the fulfilment of a very old promise, "I will be as the dew unto Israel."

IV.

The dew is fertilizing.—This is perhaps the most important thing of all, and the prophet dwells on it at some length, and evidently with much delight. This silent, copious, refreshing agent works *fruitfulness* out of all growing things. The prophet speaks of the growth of the lily, fairest of flowers, with its snow-white bell-like leaves; of the olive tree, famous for its greenness as well as for its oil; of the cedar of Lebanon, the very monarch of the vegetable kingdom; of the revival of the corn, which carries in its heart the very staff of human life; and of the spreading vine, with its rich clusters of grapes. All these, under the influence of the dew, grow in beauty, strength, and above all, in *fruitfulness.* They are thus aided in the accomplishment of the very *end* of their existence. And when God is as

the dew unto Israel, his final end is that the plants of his right hand's planting may become *fruitful.* Our divine Master speaks much, and very solemnly, on this subject of fruitfulness. We are "chosen" for this, "ordained" to this end, "that we should go and bring forth fruit, and that our fruit should remain!" He tells us that we shall thus attain the last end of our being, and of all being; our Father will be "glorified" when we "bear much fruit!" He tells us that each unfruitful branch in him, the living vine, must be cut off and cast into the fire! that each fruitful branch must be pruned "that it may bring forth more fruit!" In one of his parables we see the axe lifted up against the barren fig-tree, and only stayed by the cry of the keeper of the vineyard, "Lord let it alone this year also!" Yes! He who sends the dew comes with and after his gift, as the man came to the fig-tree "seeking fruit." It is not too strong a figure to say that he comes to us as he once came to the fig-tree by the wayside, "hungry" for fruit. He longs to see us reflecting his image, happy in his work, glorifying his Father! We ought to come to ourselves as he does, "seeking fruit." Whatever He seeks and wishes to find in us we ourselves should earnestly desire. His supreme question at this moment is, "What fruit?" And surely it should be ours. The question is, not so much "What seasons can you remember of quietness, copiousness, refreshing in

the Lord?" But rather, "What fruit have you remaining now?" Ah, brethren, how little! how little of the clear mellowed fruit of grace have we hanging visibly on our lives, or stored in our hearts! We are not altogether barren. Indeed, we could point to many things, inward and outward, regarding which we could say to the Master, "But for thee and thy gracious culture these never could have been!" And we could perhaps point to a greater number of things which as yet are only in germ and blossom, and which *may*, through grace, come to be full ripe fruit in time, and enrich the harvest of some other day. While, therefore, we confess ourselves in sorrow to be "unprofitable servants," we turn to the text both gratefully and hopefully—grateful for the measure of gracious fulfilment which has come to us; hopeful that a larger fulfilment is coming! We gladly call to mind that we are not straitened in him, and that we shall never be; that we are still to be fed from a fulness deeper than our need, higher than our thought, and ever flowingly responsive to our prayer—a fulness which space cannot comprehend, which time cannot lessen, and which a divine and infinite Redeemer alone can display! "I will be as the dew unto Israel." That simple text may be regarded by us as a condensed expression of the whole everlasting covenant of God. The heart-substance, the pith and marrow of that covenant are there. If we lay our

hand on it in faith as we look to the future, we have all the securities of grace in our grip, and all the fountains of blessing opened upon our souls. With hand on this text we cannot but expect that a richer fruitfulness will one day come, when we shall not be ashamed to say, "Let our beloved come into his garden!"

And perhaps it will be well to remember, lest we should be needlessly discouraged, lest we should be ungrateful through ignorance, that Christian fruitfulness is a manifold and various thing. It is not all of one kind. One life is not meant to be exactly like another life. Each is cast in its own type, and when the life is cast, the type or mould, as has been said, is broken. Of course it is broken, because it was composed in part of circumstances which never were before, nor ever can be again. Let *each* "planted" soul rejoice to feel rooted in him! And then let each grow freely according to his will—not fearing, but gladly daring to branch, and blossom, and fructify, according to the law of individual life. The lily! the olive tree! the corn! the vine! the cedar! All these are growing in God's garden; and there is room and dew for them all. The utilitarian Christian would say, "The lily! we cannot have that here. 'Tis only a thing of beauty; as fleeting as it is fair. It gives little smell, it yields no fruit. It must be removed to make room for *the corn.*" "Not so," saith the great Husbandman; "let the lily grow; it blooms

for me. The beauty of that fair and delicate life is my beauty. These gentle ones who cannot speak much, who cannot work much for me, who cannot endure much hardness, and who are constitutionally and by condition ill prepared to meet many of the roughnesses of life in my service, can yet live truly to me in the places where they grow. Those parts of the garden are sheltered. I have planted them there, and there I will visit and protect them. Come, behold the lilies *how* they grow, for Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these!" And the tasteful and delicate Christian, coming up to the cedar, would say—"That cannot be here! It might adorn the wild wastes of nature, but it is *not* fit for the enclosure of grace. We must, at least, if it continues, lop off its branches, and cut away some of its roots, and try to soften its stony fibre, and teach it to grow more tenderly!" "Not so," again saith the great Husbandman; "I have room for the cedar too, soil for its roots, air for its highest branches, and uses for its hardness, and time to spare from immeasurable eternity for its thousand years of life. Let those rough hard ones who cannot shine in gentleness, who cannot weep in sympathy, who cannot yield in love; who, following the bent of their nature, can only grow up into strength—*let* them grow, let them vanquish the storms, and pass through the seasons of human life with but little visible change. Let them flourish like

palm-trees, let them grow like the cedars in Lebanon; and the corn, and the vine, and the olive-tree, each according to its nature, and yet all under the influence of grace. I have planted, and I will keep them all. I will be as the dew unto Israel." We have only then to seek to yield the fruit that is proper to our own nature, and possible in the circumstances of our own life. We are not only at liberty, but it is our duty, to put aside unused, models and plans of life and usefulness which are thrust on us by others. But if we do this in a spirit of loyalty to the Master, we shall be the more anxious to grow in what is to us the true "grace and knowledge of our Lord and Saviour." And if we are thus true *to him*—watchful, responsive, receptive, communicative, ready—then will it matter but little in what department of the vegetable kingdom we find the best type and symbol of our life—whether we are like the lily in its beauty, the olive-tree in its greenness, the vine with its clusters, the corn with its bounteous burden, or the cedar with its shaggy strength—the text will shed its benediction on us all. Our gracious God "will be as the dew unto Israel."

V.

Finally, we may briefly notice another analogy, in *the nearness* to us in both cases of the reviving influence. God does not fetch the dew from stars, or from fountains

in the skies. He condenses and distils it out of the atmosphere. A little change in temperature does it all. The air that is feverish and panting with heat during the day, becomes moist with the refreshing treasure at night. May not this remind us how we are surrounded with a very atmosphere of grace, which holds all precious things in readiness to be dropt upon us when God shall command it so. The word of life is "nigh unto us," as near the soul as the atmosphere is to the body. We have only to believe—to quicken our sluggish souls to the consciousness of its presence, and lo, it is "in our mouth and in our heart." Then are we like Jacob in Bethel when he "awaked out of his sleep, and said, surely the Lord is in this place, and I knew it not. This is none other but the house of God, and this is the gate of heaven." In the days of our dullness we never know how many precious gifts and possibilities are around us, within daily and hourly reach. We are like Jacob asleep. But when the change comes, when we begin to pray, and God begins to bless, then these invisible things shine upon our opening sight in something of their intrinsic loveliness, and come in upon our awakening sense as with odours from another world. Then the infinite God is the infinite glory, then law is strong and bright, and sin is black and hateful, and then, above all, Christ "is precious," very precious, as "made of God unto us wisdom, and righteousness, and sanctification, and redemp-

tion." Then he fills and rules our whole life. He sanctifies us, and all things to us. And no "strange thing happens to us." We are reconciled to all. And nothing is "common;" we live among "sacred things;" our days, and our duties, and our difficulties, and even our temptations and afflictions are all baptized with the dew of grace. May God give us his Holy Spirit to work so on our hearts that we shall become quickly and largely receptive of those "unsearchable riches of Christ!"

The Kingdom & the Keys.

Fear not; I am he that liveth and was dead; and behold I am alive for evermore, Amen; and have the keys of hell and of death.—REVELATION i. 18.

THE *Scene* of the vision of which we have an account in the preceding verses, was the lonely Isle of Patmos. Among its barren rocks the Evangelist wandered an exile, and a prisoner for Jesus Christ, often looking out from its lofty capes and headlands on the far and never-resting sea.

The *Time* of the vision was "the Lord's day," the Christian Sabbath, consecrated for ever to him, who on that day arose from the dead, and who gives his people rest. It was probably the *morning* of the day, while strength was yet fresh and his untired thoughts were ascending to divine things.

The *Mood* was one of high religious consciousness; natural feelings of devotion were elevated into rapture —his soul was caught up for the time among spiritual and eternal things.

There can be no doubt that the speaker in this remarkable passage is none other than the Son of Man—

the Son of Man no longer in lowly guise, with the dust of travel on his garments, and weariness in his step, and sorrow looking out from his face; but the Son of Man —in his glory, with kingly robe, and golden girdle, and radiant hair, and eyes bright as flaming fire, and feet as burning brass, and countenance like the splendours of the sun, with voice like the roar of waters dashing down the cataract or fluctuating on the sea, holding in his right hand seven stars, with a sharp two-edged sword going out of his mouth.

The *Effect* of the vision was the complete prostration of the Evangelist, body and spirit. "He fell at his feet as one dead." He had often *sat* at his feet in days gone by, had even laid his head on his bosom, and there lulled his soul to rest. But now the lowliness has gone, and the splendour of the glory is very bright, the very light of heaven seems shining on rock and sea, and in the presence of the eternal majesty and the infinite purity, even the favoured disciple sinks down "as one dead." And then the King, in loving recollection probably of the friendship and familiarity of former days, laid his hand tenderly on his servant again, thrilling him with something of the old touch, and raising him up from his prostrate condition to hear the grand declaration of our text.

"Fear not, I am the first and the last; I am he that liveth and was dead; and behold I am alive for ever-

more, Amen; and have the keys of Hades and of death."

In this passage we may find at least these three things.

I.

A vast kingdom claimed. — To have "the keys" is to possess authority. To possess the key of a house, palace, or region, is to have the supreme power therein — the disposal of the things and persons located there. Among the Jews, a key, borne on the shoulder, hung by a belt, or inwrought in the robe, was the well-known badge of office. Thus it is said of Eliakim, the son of Hilkiah, "and I will clothe him with thy robe, and strengthen him with thy girdle; and I will commit thy government into his hands, and he shall be a father to the inhabitants of Jerusalem and to the house of Judah. And *the key* of the house of David will I lay upon his shoulder; he shall open and none shall shut; and he shall shut and none shall open." In this passage the expression stands in connection with others, which all signify the most unlimited sovereign authority. Our Lord, adopting the figure in the same sense, says to Peter, as representing the apostles, "I will give unto thee the keys of the kingdom of heaven, and whatsoever thou shalt bind on earth shall be bound in heaven;

and whatsoever thou shalt loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven." Here also the power is sovereign, to the extent of the jurisdiction.

Now, in the text, our Lord claims this supreme regal power for himself. "*I* have the keys, and the houses, the places, the realms, whatever they are, to which these keys give admission, are all mine. I possess them, I rule them, and from my decisions there is no appeal." Yes, brethren, this *is* the sovereign authority. A protest could be lodged, by the conscience at least, against the abuse of any kingly power on earth, and an appeal carried up to the court of heaven. Even apostles, if they had in any case legislated according to their own will, might have been resisted, and the case put into the hands of the heavenly King. But who shall dare protest against the decisions of the Son of Man? and to what court shall any cause be taken when solemn judgment has been pronounced at *his* bar? He has the keys—of what? Of earthly prisons? or of earthly palaces? of kingdoms? or continents? or seas? He does indeed possess even those keys; for all earthly kingdoms, with all their inhabitants and all their affairs, are comprehended within his royalty and realm; but the empire here is a far larger one. He has the keys "of Hades and of death." Of "Hades," for so the word which we read "hell" should undoubtedly be rendered. It signifies the whole invisible world, both heaven and

hell. The word originally means what we do not see—what is beyond the scope of our vision; and as knowledge so largely comes by sight, by a very natural transition it also comes to mean what we do not know. Now, this is true of the future world in both its regions, the one of blessedness, the other of woe. Hades is the whole invisible world, heaven and hell alike; and over all, the upper and the lower realms, Christ claims supreme sovereignty when he says that he holds "the keys" of Hades.

This is evidently a far larger and grander idea than to suppose that he simply keeps the key of hell. This whole passage is intended to shew forth his glory, but it would not much enhance that glory to close the description of it by making him the keeper of hell. A very grim kind of glory that! John Howe, in his sublime sermon on this passage, remarks, in reference to this very thing, that "It would be a like incongruity, as if to magnify the person of highest rank in the court of a mighty prince one should say, 'He is the keeper of the dungeon!' when the design of the whole passage is to speak him great." He says again, "That he should be represented as the jailor of devils and their companions is to me unaccountable, unless a very manifest necessity did induce to it."

The keys of Hades *and of death, i.e.,* of the passage which leads from this world into that. All who leave

this world, with some rare exceptions, to enter into that, go along the passage of death. Whether they go to glory or to gloom, they go by death, and the Redeemer has the keys of death. His dominion does not begin *beyond* the last barriers and confines of mortality; it is a power which commands those barriers, which claims death, and holds its keys.

The vast Hades over which he reigns is already populous with its several kinds of life, and his voice commands audience, and his sceptre gives law among all its diversified races, and to its most distant domains. But this is not all. His is also the power of deciding how fast or how slowly that "Hades" is to be peopled still more by the transference of those whose probation is finished on earth. None can enter among the immortals until he shall turn the key of death. None can stay among mortals after that key for him has been turned. He has the key of death.

But even this is not all. No more is expressed in this passage, but far more is implied. The claim here is not only over the invisible, and the passage which leads to it, but over the visible too—over all this present visible life. For to decide by authority at what time any one shall die, is in fact to decide how long he shall live, and of course also when he shall be born. The "time to be born," and the "time to die," are under the same control. It would be absurd as well as im-

pious to suppose the key of birth to be in the hand of one and the key of death in the hand of another, or to suppose that the visible and the invisible are under different rulers. No! all is one vast kingdom, the visible, the invisible, and the passage leading from the one to the other, and Christ holds the keys. "To this end he both died and rose again and revived, that he might be Lord of the dead and living." Death and life, things present and things to come, height and depth, all are his. There is no realm of the universe for which he has not a key; there is no being whom he does not command; no event that he does not control.

He has the key of birth, by the turning of which each is ushered into being; the key of childhood, which admits the little pilgrim to the first steps of the journey; the key of youth, which opens the gates into life's greenest and most radiant fields; the key of manhood, which sets the pilgrim on life's hill-top; the key of old age, which lets him gently down among the shadows; and the key of death, which ends all toil and sorrow here, and sends the traveller along that short passage which will leave him at the gate of heaven or of hell. And of those great realms too, as we have seen, he has the keys: opens and no man shuts, shuts and no man opens. And of all which chequers life and gives character to it in its progress, he possesses the power. "The day is his;" he turns the key and opens the eyelids of

the morning. "The night is his;" he draws its shade over a sleeping world. He keeps the key of every marriage home, where two pilgrims come into one path; of sickness, and when he turns it the strong man must lay his head on the pillow; of health, and when he touches *it*, the sufferer is raised up and led out again into the summer air; of prosperity, and its streams flow full and strong; of adversity, and its gales are bitter and its days are dark; of friendship, and hearts are "knit together in love;" of every change, of every circumstance, of all that gives life its character, of all that shapes the soul's after destiny, and of that destiny itself, be it realised in the heavenly places and amid the splendours of his own presence, or in any of the realms of the "outer darkness," where that gracious presence never comes; of all and of each, he has the keys.

Majestic kingdom! whose lengths and breadths, and depths and heights far surpass our knowledge! over the vastness of which we can only look, but never travel! The interests of which we can think of, but never comprehend! The glories of which come only within the scope of one eye, the eye of omniscience. The powers of which rest only in the hands of one being, and he the Everlasting King!

II.

A Royal Title exhibited.—For a kingdom without a rightful monarch is nothing; a mere abstraction! either a scene of emptiness, or a theatre for confusion and misrule. As creation supposes creator, and law supposes lawgiver, so kingdom supposes king; and the king of such a kingdom must have a royal title which cannot be impugned. "I am he that liveth and was dead, and behold I am alive for evermore, Amen." This is the title by which he lays rightful claim to the vast mediatorial kingdom; and it is a title which God and man, angels and devils, alike must acknowledge as valid and true.

This title, observe, does not rest on his divinity alone; that he had from all eternity: nor on his humanity alone; for no mere man *could* hold space and time in his grasp; and rule life and death; and be the judge of quick and dead.

It is a title wrought out by his incarnation, and inseparably connected with his mediatorial character. The substance of it is the life of the God-man with its sorrows, virtues, obedience. It is written as with the blood of his cross. The light by which we read it is the light of his resurrection. All this will appear perhaps more clearly, if we compare the text with some other verses in this same chapter. Look to the 8th verse.

"I am Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the ending, saith the Lord, which is, and which was, and which is to come, the Almighty." In these words we have the clear attributes of God—omnipotence, eternity, immutability. But he does not, in virtue of possessing these, claim the kingdom we have been describing, and its powers. Look also to verse 11th, "I am Alpha and Omega, the first and the last; and what thou seest write in a book, and send it unto the seven churches." Write it, because it is true, send it because it is important. Still, there is no claiming of the kingdom, no shewing of the keys. But now look again to the text, "I am he that liveth and was dead, and behold, I am alive for evermore, Amen;—*and have the keys*," not because "I am he that liveth" alone—that would only shew him to be God, nor because "I am he that was dead" alone—that would only shew him to be man; but because "I am he that liveth, *and* was dead, *and* am alive for evermore," *therefore* I have the keys. But what! Did he literally obtain all this power for the first time on the morning of his resurrection, or on the day when he ascended into heaven leading captivity captive? Yes! in so far as it is mediatorial power, he obtained it by these means and could obtain it only so. If he had never pitied man, never come to earth, he would have had the keys, but he could not have *used* them as he does now. He would have had the key of this world, but it would have been

a wilderness, blighted with the curse—of death, but it would have been a monster, seizing the generations of men, and dragging them to darkness and despair. Of hell, and he could have opened it for entrance, and shut it against departure. Of heaven, and he could have barred it against all the miserable suppliants who might have tried to enter it from this fallen world, but his omnipotence and his mercy combined, could not have taken one through the golden gates.

Oh yes! this wondrous power of salvation he obtained through weakness; this glory which heaven will never let die sprang out of the shame of the cross. He was born that mothers might forget their sorrow, and rejoice when a man-child is born into the world. He wandered by the hill-sides of Syria, by the shores of the Galilean lake, through the gardens of Olivet, and sometimes had not where to lay his head, that he might lead wanderers home to the house of many mansions. He wept that he might still all human sorrow, and cover the faces of mourners with gladness again. He prayed that he might be the hearer of prayer. He died that we might not fear to die, hoping to find life in him. And now he has gone to claim his kingdom; he has received it from the Father, and through all its wide realms he exhibits *His Royal Title*—a title which all the good accept, and which the very devil dare not impugn. "And you hath he quickened together with him, having

forgiven you all trespasses." "Blotting out the handwriting of ordinances that was against us, which was contrary to us, and took it out of the way, nailing it to his cross. And having spoiled principalities and powers, he made a show of them openly, triumphing over them in it." "For it pleased the Father that in him should all fulness dwell, and having made peace by the blood of his cross, by him to reconcile all things unto himself; by him I say, whether they be things on earth or things in heaven." "Wherefore he saith, when he ascended up on high, he led captivity captive, and gave gifts unto men. Now that he ascended, what is it but that he also descended first into the lower parts of the earth? He that descended is the same also that ascended up far above all heavens, that he might fill all things." "The Lord reigneth, let the earth be glad." "And he must reign until he hath put all enemies under his feet."

In all these passages his earthly work is represented as the foundation and the beginning of his heavenly rule. He won the title to his majestic kingdom by suffering. He descended to depths which we can never fathom, that he might ascend to heights which we cannot see. He abased himself, and God has highly exalted him. He was clothed in mockery with the purple robe, and crowned in derision with the crown of thorns, that he might claim and wear the "many crowns" which represent the royalties of the universe, and have on his

vesture and on his thigh the name written "King of kings and Lord of lords."

All the power he wields now is *mediatorial* power—when he forgives the sin of the penitent, when he finds the lost sheep in the wilderness, when he builds up the ruined nature, when he makes us sons and daughters of the Lord Almighty, when he teaches us to cry, in the spirit of filial love, "Abba Father," when he dries the mourner's tears, when he binds up the broken heart, when he lifts us above doubt and fear, change and circumstance, toil and temptation, causing us to sit together with himself in the heavenly places, and making us "kings and priests unto God, and our Father," when he makes all things work together for our good, when he gives us the victory in death, when he lays us in the peaceful grave, when he fills the hearts of those who gather around it with joyful thoughts of resurrection, when he enraptures our spirits with the final welcome home—He does all, as a loving friend indeed, but also as a crowned monarch, as one who has the royal right to save with the everlasting salvation, as one whose title will be bright and clear when mountains and seas have passed away, and the heavens have been rolled together as a scroll.

His title to this universal kingdom is *our* title to the blessings of grace and salvation. And so he tells us not to be afraid, for our enemies are vanquished; not to be

ashamed, for our redemption draweth nigh. He teaches us to defy all antagonisms; to claim all needful helps; to put our proprietary seal upon every visible thing; to say, "All things are ours, for we are Christ's;" to open our hearts every day for grace; to hasten on every day to glory; to endow ourselves with his unsearchable riches, and to fill our souls unto all the fulness of God. And we feel that if there be a flaw in his title there is a worm at the root of our hope; and that, if there be no reigning Christ in heaven, we are of all men on earth most miserable.

But no! Christians are of all men most happy. Far happier we might be; but although we have not claimed, we will never sell our birthright. Although we have oft been silent when we might have had a song, we will not cast away our harps, nor hang them on the willows, but keep them ready strung for the joys of coming days, and for the angel-song above:—"Worthy is the Lamb that was slain." "The Lord is our lawgiver. The Lord is our King." If he condemns us, we are clean gone for ever. If he justifies, who is he that condemneth? "We will hear *now* what God the Lord will say unto us, for he will speak *peace* unto his people and to his saints, and they shall not turn again to folly.

Thus we come to the third and last point:—

III.

The Gracious Proclamation made.—"Fear not." It is very brief. It is spoken in a breath, and with one opening of the lips. But it is the word of the great King, and as spoken by him it casts a protective shadow over the heads of his trusting people as broad as his power, as cool and refreshing as his love. Everything in this text being on the largest scale, I think we are justified in giving this dehortation also its widest and most general application.

It is a dissuasion from all fear that "hath torment," from all undue anxiety and apprehension, from all excitement, foreboding, solicitude, which would bring pain. It affects all personal, all relative, and all religious and public interests. "Fear not" for any of them. Let us try (with much reverence) to give expression and expansion to this gracious declaration of the great King.

"FEAR NOT" for thyself. I will wash thee throughly from thine iniquities, and cleanse thee from thy sins, create in thee a clean heart, and renew a right spirit within thee, give thee the joys of my salvation, and uphold thee with my free spirit. I will console thee in trouble, strengthen thee for duty, open a way for thee amid life's perplexities, pitch thy tent in safe places, and be around thy tabernacle with my sheltering pre-

sence until it is taken down, and thou art called to the house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens. Thy path may seem rugged and cheerless; but it is open and onward; and I will pass with thee myself along all its length, nor leave thee in the shades which hang over its close. I will be with thee in the dark valley to support thy trembling steps with my rod and staff; I will softly unlock the awful door, and usher thee into Hades, where a thousand sights of beauty will fill thy delighted eye, and a thousand voices of welcome will hail thy coming.

"*Fear not*" for any among thy kindred and acquaintance of the same family of God. There is a shield over the head of each, a providence as watchful of every one as if that one alone were a dweller on the earth. When they pass through the waters they shall not overflow them, and through the flame it shall not kindle upon them. While they live they are mine; "they live unto the Lord." When they die they are mine; "they die unto the Lord"—living and dying, they are the Lord's. Fear not with a slavish unfilial fear, for any whom thou lovest. They are dear to you, are they less dear to me? Thy brother is dead, but he will be alive again. Thy sister is lost, but she shall be found.

"*Fear not,*" amid changes however startling, circumstances however unexpected; for I am not a mere watcher over a broken and lawless world, mending, and

checking, and trying to save something from the wreck! I am the perfect ruler of a perfect providence, setting kings on their thrones and watching sparrows in their fall; preserving your mightiest interests, and numbering the hairs of your head!

Brethren, it is *this* "fear not," which often we most need to hear; we do not exercise ourselves in *great* matters—we can trust these to him, for we feel they are too high for us; but we do painfully exercise ourselves in lesser things as if we had the sole charge of them. We should not for a moment presume to grasp the keys; but we do presume, in our thoughts, to dictate when and where, and how they shall be used. We strive, oftentimes almost unconsciously perhaps, to rearrange and reordain particular circumstances, and even whole scenes in our life and in the lives of others. And with a still more importunate and sorrowful eagerness do we seek to have some power in arranging for life's close. We would not dare to take the key of death into our own hand, but we would touch it while it lies in his. *Not now*, or *Not there*, or *Not thus*, we are always saying.

NOT NOW, we say, when the father is called to leave the family of which he is the sole stay. "Let him live, let a few years elapse, let his family be provided for, let his work be done!" It *is* done, is the answer. His fatherless children *are* provided for; I have taught him

to leave them with me. "The Father of the fatherless, the Husband of the widow, is God in his holy habitation."

Not now, we say, when the mother has heard the home-call, and with a calmness and courage greater than those of the soldier in battle, is rising above all her cares, and becoming a child again, at the threshold of the heavenly home. Oh, not now! Who will check the waywardness, encourage the virtues, receive the confidences, soothe the little sorrows, and train the loves of those infant hearts? Who will teach the evening prayer, and listen to the sabbath hymn? Who *can* give a mother's care and feel a mother's love? I, saith the Shepherd, I will gather the lambs with mine arm, and carry them in *my* bosom. I will forget no prayer of the dying mother's heart. I will treasure in *my* heart the yearnings of her life over her children, and the unutterable compassions of her dying hour; and when many years have sped, and she has been long in heaven, these children will remember her in their holiest and happiest moments, and by their walk and their work will be proving that she did not live in vain, that she *finished* the work that was given her to do."

Or, we say, "*Not there,*" oh, not there! Away on the sea—a thousand miles from land—let him not die there, and be dropped into the unfathomed grave, where the unstable waves must be his only monument, and the winds the sole mourners of the place! Or not in

some distant city or far-off land—strangers around his bed, strangers closing his eyes, and then carrying him to a stranger's grave. Let him come home and die amid the whisperings and breathings of the old unquenchable love. "He *is* going home," is the answer, and going by the best and only way. "I can open the gate beautiful in any part of the earth or sea. I can set up the mystic ladder, the top of which reaches to heaven, in the loneliest island, at the furthest ends of the earth, and your friends will flee to the shelter of *my* presence all the more fully because yours is far away."

Or, we say, "*Not thus*," not through such agonies of body, or faintings of spirit, or tremblings of faith—not in unconsciousness—not without dying testimonies. Let there be outward as well as inward peace. Let mention be made of thy goodness. Let there be foretellings and foreshewings of the glory to which, as we trust, they are going. Oh, shed down the light, the fragrancy of heaven, upon the dying bed! The answer is, "they are there, and you are so dull of sense that you perceive them not. Your friend is filled with the 'peace that passeth understanding,' and safe in the everlasting arms."

Thus, brethren, the *time* and the *place*, and *the circumstances*, are all arranged by the wisdom and the will of him who holds the keys, and we could not, even if we had our own will and way, make anything better

than it is in the perfect plan. Better! everything would be worse—inconceivably worse if *we* had the keys. Let us trust them, with a loyal loving trust, with him who graciously says to us "Fear not;" one who, in this as in all other things, will treat us and give to us according to our faith.

"Fear not." "The sinners in Zion *are* afraid; fearfulness surprises the hypocrites." It is in vain to say "Fear not" to one who has in his nature all the elements on which fear feeds and lives, a sinful conscience, an unloving heart. And the Saviour does not say "fear not" to any such. He says "Enter into the rock, and hide thee in the dust, *for fear of the Lord*, and for the glory of his majesty." "Tremble, ye that are at ease; be troubled, ye careless ones." He says in effect, "*Let* your heart be troubled, also let it be afraid; ye do not believe in God, ye do not believe in me!"

There must be fear where there is sin, and sin confronted with power such as we have been describing. It is natural to have fear in looking to any kind of power, if we feel that we are not in alliance with that power, or with him who is putting it forth. The great powers of nature strike us with awe, almost with terror. But all the grandeurs and horrors of material nature, are as nothing compared with the majesty of that power which must be for ever against wilful sin. Come over, by repentance, and humility

and faith to the side of that power, and it will be a shelter, a pavilion, a refuge for ever. And then you will hear, and be glad in the gladness of his people to hear, these royal and gracious utterances which we have been describing.

It is sometimes brought as a charge against evangelical preaching that it makes appeal too constantly to one of the lowest principles of human nature, the principle of *fear*—that instead of winning men to goodness by an exhibition of its intrinsic beauty, and drawing men to heaven by opening its gates and its glories to their faith—the attempt is made to drive them thither, by opening beneath them the mouth of hell, and throwing around them a wild storm of wrath and terror. There may be some ground for the charge, but really not very much. To give priority and predominance to "the terrors of the Lord" is a grievous perversion of the gospel of God's grace; but to leave these terrors altogether out of view is surely an error on the other side. To make *no* appeal to fear is to profess ourselves wiser than God, and better than Christ, and superior to our very selves. We *have* the principle of fear within us; and that is but a shallow philosophy and a one-sided religion which would ignore its existence, and treat a fallen sinful man as if he were an angel of God. If there be nothing to fear, why does the Saviour say "Fear not?" How comes it that the principle is

planted so profoundly in our nature? Why is the heart so often in shadow? Why does the conscience tremble? What a mockery, what a contradiction, what a piece of organised moral dishonesty must a human soul be, if there is nothing to fear! And why in that case do we preach at all? Why do we name a Saviour's name, if we deny the necessity of a saving work? But the truth is that it does not need our preaching to make men afraid. Men *are* afraid. Their joys are tremulous; their burdens heavy; their hearts unresting; their souls oftentimes thrown into a very trance of strange, solemn dread; as they behold the mysteries of life, and think of the possibilities of the future. Men are in fear. Conscience is the preacher; law the substance of the sermon; trials and conflicts the illustrations of it; and God the waiting judge. Oh! yes, men are in fear, men are in flight. They flee because they are afraid; on and on, from morning till noon, from noon till night, from sleeping to waking, from waking to sleeping, from city to sea-side, from sea-side back again to city, from summer to winter, from winter to summer, until the little round of life is rounded, and the fugitives are all hidden in the grave.

It is no extravagance, it is but truth, to say that if we could see the movements of human souls, we should see multitudes of them in constant flight through the whole of their earthly life; and not in all the companies of this

great host is there one brave, strong spirit·self-centred, and fearing no evil. There is a great multitude which no man can number growing strong in the Lord, and in the power of his might. *They* have surmounted fear by faith; they have laid hold of everlasting strength; they go forth conquering and to conquer. But the others *are* afraid, and unless you could lay their very soul in ruins, and build it up anew, you could not relieve them of that feeling by any of your natural reasonings, nor by the kindest of your devices could you stay their flight.

But there is One in pursuit, so to speak, of this retreating host, and he cries to one and all, "Turn ye, turn ye, why will ye die?" Death will come by flight: life, by pausing, and turning, and trusting in me. He cries, "Fear not, I am he that liveth and was dead, and behold I am alive for evermore, Amen; and have the keys of Hades, and of death." "Now then, we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God did beseech you by us; we pray you in Christ's stead, be ye reconciled to God." We press upon you again the most gracious invitation you have ever received. We lay the richest of all offers again in your sight; and the invitation *is to you*—"The Master is come and calleth for *thee*"—and you are hearing the call at last as to yourself! Weary and heavy-laden, you *are* coming now to him! You feel now the enfoldings of the everlasting arms! You come at last, after many weary wanderings, and struggles

which can never be told, to rest on the bosom of the everlasting love; and as ships flee from the storm, or after it is over, glide into the quiet haven, so you, leaving sin and fear behind you now for ever, enter by faith into the eternal rest.

The House of Obed-Edom.

And the ark of God remained with the family of Obed-edom in his house three months. And the Lord blessed the house of Obed-edom, and all that he had.—1 CHRON. xiii. 14.

WHAT mysterious powers of different kinds lie sleeping in this ark of God! It contains the lightning and the dew. Bolts of ireful justice flash out of it, and soft airs of mercy breathe around the place where it rests. It has "a savour of life unto life, and of death unto death." Uzzah, in a moment of thoughtless carefulness, did but put forth his hand to stay it when the oxen stumbled on the rough road, and in a moment more he lay dead upon the way. It came into the house of Obed-edom the Gittite, and during the three months of its stay, indeed we may say ever afterwards, "the Lord blessed the house of Obed-edom and all that he had."

The ark was the symbol of God's presence. It contained the tables of the law, and beside it lay a copy of the book of the law, a vase of gold, containing a quantity of manna, and Aaron's rod that budded. During the march of the Israelites it was borne with great reverence by the priests, covered with a purple pall, in advance of

the host. It was held on their shoulders in the midst of Jordan, and the waves rolled back until all the people had passed over. It was carried in procession around Jericho, before the taking of that city. When the Temple was built it was deposited in the innermost and holiest part—in the "holy of holies"—in the very secret place of the Most High, and beneath the shadow and the brightness of the Almighty. It is not wonderful, therefore, that both curse and blessing, death and life, should flow from it.

God's presence now is not symbolized and localized as of old. Not in Jerusalem, nor in Samaria, but through the whole earth is he sought and found. Sacred things and sacred places have ceased to exist, at least in the old sense, in order that *all* God's people may be elevated to a higher standing, and may have the more room to become *sacred persons. Every* truly Christian household now has the blessing that so enriched the home of Obed-edom during the three months when the ark was there. We thus have naturally as the subject for consideration—

Religion in the Home.

I.

It is a power of fulfilment—a power of fulfilment in regard to the very idea and purpose of home. Home!

It is a word of sacred charm. There is, perhaps, no other word in the language which awakens so many pleasant memories and associations. It glides into the heart very gently, yet when there, takes full possession of sympathy and affection.

But is there not, to very many, a touch of *sorrow* in the word, a blameful yearning sense of vacancy and incompleteness? Is there not in many a heart an unspoken, and, perhaps, an almost unconscious wish, that home were either more or less?—more satisfying and more safe, or less capable of stirring affections which it cannot command, and suggesting an ideal, the reality of which is never attained? Let any thoughtful loving man inquire into the reason of this, and he will find that there is only one regal thing in this world, and that wherever the rule of this royal thing is not acknowledged, there will be corresponding lack of order, completeness, rest. He will find that home does not attain its highest meaning, does not possess its own fulness, without religion. *Religion is the sole power of fulfilment* in regard to the very purpose and idea of home. A house may be full of persons who are very dear to each other, very kind to each other; full of precious things—affections, hopes, living interests; but if God is not there as the Ruler and Father of the house, the original and true idea of home will not be realised; vacancy and need will still be at the heart of all. Good things will grow feebly

and uncertainly, like flowers in winter, trying to peep out into the sunshine, yet shrinking from the blast. Evil things will grow with strange persistency, notwithstanding protests of the affections and efforts of the will. Mysterious gulfs will open at times where it was thought strong foundations had been laid. Little things will produce great distresses. Great things, when attained, will shrink to littleness. Flickerings of uncertainty and fear will run along the days. Joys will not satisfy Sorrows will surprise. In the very heart of that home there will be a sickness, arising from need unsatisfied and "hope deferred." It will be as when a man of ingenuity tries in vain to put together the separated parts of a complicated piece of mechanism. He tries it this way and that, puts the pieces into every conceivable mode of arrangement, then at last stops and says, "There must be a piece wanting." Home without divine presence is at best a moral structure with the central element wanting. The other elements may be arranged and re-arranged; they will never exactly fit, nor be "compact together," until *it* is obtained. We have heard of haunted houses. That house will be haunted with the ghost of an unrealised idea. It will seem to its most thoughtful inmates at best but "the shadow of some good thing to come," and the longing for the substance will be the more intense, because the shadow, as a providential prophecy, is always there.

In many a house there is going on, by means of those quick spiritual signs which One above can read, what we may call a dialogue of souls, composed chiefly of unspoken questionings, which, if articulate, might be something like the following:—"How is it, that with all our efforts and sacrifices, we do not seem to be coming any nearer the realisation of the great idea which we appear to possess in common? How is it that we cannot be to each other what we wish, that we cannot do for each other what we try, even when it seems to be quite within the range of possibility? Why is there such a sorrow in our affection? such a trembling in our joys? so great a fear of change, and so profound a sense of incompleteness in connection with the very best we can do and be?" And what is the answer to such mute yet eager questionings? And who can speak that answer? That One above who hears the dialogue must take part in it; and all must listen while he speaks, and tells of another fatherhood, under which the parents must become little children, of another brotherhood which, when attained, will make the circle complete. When the members of such a household, who have been looking so much to each other, shall agree to give one earnest look above, and say, "Our Father, which art in Heaven!" "our elder Brother and Advocate with the Father!" then will come back, sweet as music, into the heart of that house, these fulfilling words, from the everlasting Father, "Ye shall

be my sons and daughters;" from the eternal Son, "Behold my mother, and sister, and brother!" Then the one thing that was lacking will be present. The missing element will be in its place, and all the other elements will be assembled around it. It is a haunted house no more. The ghost has been chased away. The house is wholesome. Mornings are welcome. Nights are restful. The discipline of toil links itself closely with the dispensation of recompense; and all day long, amid busy "goings out and comings in," will be heard the low sweet murmurings of the life and happiness which have been found. There will not be perfection even then. Probably, at first, owing to the immense elevation of the standard of true home life, there will be a deeper sense of imperfection than there was before. Christian homes are far from being perfect. But this immense attainment has been made; some view, at last, has been gotten of the *true* ideal after which the natural instincts and affections were only blindly striving, and some well-grounded hope of being able now, through Divine help, to change the ideal into the real, day by day, and ever more and more. The aching sorrow has passed away now from the heart of that home. The long-sought secret is revealed Soul whispers to soul "Emmanuel —God with us!" Home *is* home at last.

II.

It is a principle of harmony.

We have just said that Christian homes are not perfect. In fact, the inmates of such homes never know how much is amiss in each and all until religion has entered as a fulfilling power. There was before a more vast and painful sense of some unknown deficiency; but now there is a more practical and far more fruitful sense of what is really wrong; and connected therewith, there are wise and well-directed efforts to rectify and to supply. Now will begin the work of serious and high reformation. There will be the purification of motive, the elevation of aim, the exercise of deeper self-denial, the breathing of intenser loves, and a common consciousness through the house that higher elements of life are at work, and that all possible endeavours are *worthily* expended, with a view to the realisation of a common end. Now we say that religion is the only principle of harmony in the endeavour after this highest and best home life. Not only does it begin it by supplying the missing element which unites and quickens all the rest; but it conducts its progress as a regulative force; bending, drawing, moulding, transforming, guarding, guiding everything, with the view of advancement from the first perfection of the ideal, to the higher and satisfying perfection of the real.

Observe exactly what it is we are saying here. We say that religion is a perfect principle of harmony for the Christian home; but this is not to say that the principle bears all its proper fruits, and that every such home is a scene of unbroken harmony. That will come only when the families of the wise and good shall be gathered into one, and the house with many mansions shall be the home. If we should draw an Elysian picture of peacefulness, and say, "Behold the description of what you will find in every house where true religion is!" you would only smile, or sigh; and the world (not sighing) would smile its smile of dark incredulity or merry scorn; for both church and world would know quite well that the picture was not a copy of anything the painter had often or perhaps ever seen. Some Christian homes, indeed, are very peaceful. One enters them with the same kind of soothed and comforted feeling with which a traveller, after a toilsome walk over the breezy hills, comes down on a little placid lake, hardly ruffled by the breeze, and fringed with freshest green. Others, again, are more troubled. But we must not hastily conclude that the uniformly placid house is really farther advanced in the harmonies of Christian living than some others which are less serene. It may be so; but it *may* also be quite the reverse. Sometimes the jarrings are brought out just by the endeavours after the higher harmonies. The falls are incurrod in the

attempts to climb. Failures are the more apparent if the efforts are high. A visible and constant serenity in a family is a beautiful thing (and no one will regard these remarks as intended to apologize for evil tempers, or to palliate any selfish wilful ways by which the peace of a household is interrupted), a very beautiful thing; but it *may* be quite as largely the result of circumstances as the fruit of grace. A family may be placid by temperament, or from easy circumstances, or from good health, or from want of any high ambition, intellectual or other. A simple devoutness is all that is proposed, and it is attained amid the shining of a quiet beauty from day to day. Another family (that over the way) may be hinted at as not quite so well regulated, as much behind in the graces and harmonies of religious life. And yet there is a deeper and more felt application of the regulating and harmonizing powers of divine grace in this case than in the former. Then "why," you ask, "the occasional strain? why those shadows flitting amid the sunshine? why the hasty word, the clouded brow, the thoughtless demand from one, the sigh of disappointment from another?" These things may be because in *this* family there is really much more to be regulated. There is more intellect to be used, more will to be directed, more passion to be subdued, stronger conflicts with outward circumstances, greater variety in temperament, and, withal, a much

higher ideal, towards which they are all, more or less consciously, working their way through these occurring and incidental imperfections. An outside judgment, in such a case, is almost sure to be wrong. *How much* the harmonising power of religion is felt and yielded to, can be ascertained only by an estimate so careful and considerate, that no one out of the house can make it. A stranger happening to come into a certain house in Bethany, just at the moment when Martha—overburdened with her cares, grieved and almost angry with her sister Mary—said, "Lord, dost thou not care that my sister hath left me to serve alone? bid her therefore that she help me"—would not have had a very favourable idea of the peacefulness of that house. And yet are we not right in thinking of it as probably, at that time, the very happiest home in the world? The members of that family were not all formed after one type. Busy Martha must be working—thoughtful Mary must be listening—Lazarus must live in his own way, not in the ways of his sisters, exactly. Yet they could all live together lovingly in *his* presence, who beautified and refreshed their home by every visit he made to it, and struck chords of harmony in their home life which their own unskilful fingers could never have touched. So it often is still. We have no wish to deny the existence of these occasional jarrings and discords in the pursuit of the fuller harmony. Indeed, we must see that even

where that harmony is largely obtained and enjoyed, there are still breaks in the strain, pauses in the progress, and flashes of escaping fire, it may be, at the very time when a deeper spiritual affinity is reached and realized by these struggling souls. We really can have no interest as Christians in looking at this matter, nor in representing it to others, in any light but one severely true. "Hush! hush!" say some; "do not speak or write of the imperfections in the families of the good; they are very sad. You cannot *say* they have no existence, but *seem* as if they had none. Draw pictures of Paradise regained, and put *them* forth to the people." But does any one suppose that keen-eyed and thoughtful people of the world are for a moment deluded by *such* seeming? No, no; good can never come out of a truthless charity. The house of Obed-edom is *not* perfect, but it is in sight of perfection. Its members are in *pursuit* of perfection. They are *attaining* it by degrees, and the blessing which adds no sorrow is wonderfully helping their endeavours, and preparing harvest fulness of success and joy, with which to crown them in a better world than this.

Now, in virtue of such a state of things, such experiences and such hopes, may we not well suppose a father—head of a Christian home—holding colloquy with an objector, who is anxious to reduce all homes and all characters to one common level, and who, with

that view, has been looking into the good man's house with the eye of the critic, and pointing at certain things with the finger of the censor? May we not suppose that father meeting him with open face, and holding free discourse with him in some such fashion as this? "Come and let us reason together on this matter. We think, we believe that, through the coming of this divine thing, religion, into our house, we have now a completeness in our idea which we never had before. We at least *know* now what we ought to be, and to live for, as individuals, and as one of the families of Israel. We also believe that we are conscious of a great power of help and harmony coming to us through all our endeavours to live a life of spiritual obedience to God. *You* have been looking at some of the little troubles on the surface; but there are depths of conscious peace which only *we* have sounded. None but ourselves *can* know how much of new moral power, and love, and sweet refreshment, 'the glorious gospel of the blessed God' has brought into our house—what thrillings of higher sympathy it has awakened, and what secret seekings of heart to heart, and what unity of purpose in regard to life's highest aims, and what tenderness and brightness in our common hope. And these imperfections of which you speak, and which we ourselves sorely lament—we believe we are getting away from them by degrees. They drop from us as we look up, and travel on together

to the 'large and wealthy place.' And now about yourself. What is *your* ideal, and your endeavour? Are you doing any better? Have you got a nobler fulfilment of the natural aspirations and questionings of the heart? a better plan of life, and more success in pursuing it, than has chanced to me and mine? For the sake of all the great interests at stake, both yours and mine, I think you ought to tell me truly how these things are. To scoff or sneer can be nothing to the point. We are brethren in calamity, sinners and sufferers together; and if you and yours, without religion, are really better than I and mine with it, then you ought to pity and help us, by shewing us carefully the more excellent way!"

If we do not here introduce any answer to such discourse, it is simply because we believe that no answer of any force for the unchristian cause can be given. We believe, and are sure, that when the whole case is brought out to view, or as much into view as possible, it will still be found that the truest, dearest harmonies in all the social life of man are sounding *only* in the Christian home; and that those imperfections of which some make so much, and of which no one ought to make too little, are, after all, but like the flitting shadows of a sunny day—but like the chafing of the stream as it rushes against the rocky barrier on its passage to the peaceful plains which it will fertilize, or to the depths of ocean where it will rest.

III.

Religion in the house is a source of prosperity.

"The Lord blessed the house of Obed-edom and all *that he had.*" We know not what he had when the ark came, but we know that, whether it was much or little, it soon became much more. Josephus says that he was poor, and that in these months his estate increased, to the envy of his neighbours. It would seem more likely, however, that the blessing was such and so great, that it overcame envy, and filled his neighbours rather with admiring thoughts of divine goodness. Matthew Henry says, in his own quaint way (deep truth underlying the quaintness), that "the ark paid well for its entertainment." "It is a guest that none shall lose by that bid it welcome." "Let masters of families be encouraged to keep up religion, and to serve God and the interests of his kingdom with their houses and estates, for that is the way to bring a blessing upon all they have."

It was peculiarly the way in Old Testament times. The connection between religion and temporal success was then firm and close. The cause and the consequence were then visibly and near together. The godly dwelt securely in the land. Bread was given them, and water was sure. Their garners were full, affording all manner of store—their sheep were counted by thousands and tens of thousands in their streets—their oxen were

strong to labour—there was no breaking in nor going out. To be "in such a case" was to be "happy;" but it was more, it was a proof to them that "their God was the Lord."

The connection between the natural and the spiritual is as real as ever, although in some cases not so visible. Life is more complex; it has greater interests, heavier tasks, and higher prizes. The working of the new elements strikes sometimes upon the old simple law, and prevents it from throwing out its fruits *so speedily*. But the law is strong and lasting. It is announced with the utmost firmness by our Lord, "All these things *shall be added* unto you;" and by his apostle, "Godliness hath the promise of the life that now is." The Lord still blesses the house of Obed-edom and *all that he has*. The Obed-edom of our time "*has*" far more than this ancient worthy in whose house the ark rested. He has some stake in the highest things of modern life, and prosperity to him in his affairs is a much wider and grander thing. He has character ventured forth in his affairs, and the Lord blesses that, for the good of those who are affected by it. He has plans of usefulness, and in so far as they are wise and good, the Lord blesses *them*. He has controversies with evil principles and with evil men, and the Lord blesses these, by giving him strength for the battle, and by granting triumph to the truth. He has reverses, and the Lord blesses them.

and shews him how his "corn of wheat which fell into the ground and died will soon bring forth much fruit." A thoughtful, earnest man now, feels himself connected with politics, with law, with battles, with civilization, with churches, with religion, with life in all its phases. He has some stake, some property in all these things, and in proportion to the earnestness and greatness of his mind, he will feel that these are the real interests of his life, for which he needs "blessing" from the Lord; that flocks and herds, or houses and lands, or ships and stores, in themselves simply, are much less, relatively, than they were, because the greater things have come far more into play. A man now, who would take up religion solely because it would probably make his business prosper—you know what you would think of him. No! that mere material interest in itself is now but one among many interests; and the promise is, that prosperity shall be over the whole—that a good man's labour shall be a gaining thing to him in many ways, his life a growing thing in the best ways—that the Lord "will make his way prosperous, and that he shall have good success"—that the Lord will "bless the house of Obed-edom, and *all that he has.*"

IV.

Religion in the house of a good man, is likely to be a legacy to his children.

The ark went away from the house of Obed-edom at the end of three months; but the connection between the ark and his family was not then brought to an end. He is mentioned again, *with his sons*, in the later history, as established about the ark. They keep the doors; they carry harps; they "excel" in the music, and spend all their time in promoting the worship and kingdom of God in the earth.

So, piety and its blessings often descend in the same house from father to son, from one generation to another. This is according to the law and will of God. We see and regard in our actions only the living. He sees those who are to live, to "the third and fourth generation." In the piety of the living, and in the laws of Christian family life, he makes provision for what we may call the transmission of religion to those who shall come after. The law of transmission is not invariable—at any rate, it admits, in so far as we can see, of some sad exceptions. Our Saviour tells us that it is not a law of "blood, or of the will of man," apart from life and character. He warns us against the folly of "saying within ourselves that we have Abraham to our father."

But there is a law, although our mere "will does not command it." That law is "of God." He knows its force. He forms its living links. He binds the generations together. He acknowledges the parental teaching as his own "nurture," the parental warnings as his

own "admonition," and when the child is "trained up in the way that he should go," it is ruled in his counsels that, "when he is old, he shall not depart from it." "Instead of the fathers there are the children, whom he makes princes in the earth."

What a strength of encouragement, and what a depth of solace there is in this gracious law, for all godly parents who are striving, like Abraham, to command their children and their household after them! Such parents may assure themselves that that endeavour is in the very line of God's loving will to them and theirs. In the rule of their house, and in the spirit of their life, they are casting the forms which will be peopled and animated with the future "families of Israel." They are handing down the traditions of greatness, and the sacred roll of their heavenly lineage to those who will know how to value them, and how to transmit them, with added splendours, to a still future age. They are preparing places in that future age, as dwellings for God. They are making room for his Fatherhood. The human fatherhood is a transient and uncertain thing. Every thoughtful father must often think, and the more as life goes on, "I am going the way of all flesh, I must leave my children soon, some of them young, some not clearly formed in character, all of them in a world of searching trial!" And the thought is at least very solemn, if not sad. But let that father

think, for it is true—"I can live after I am dead. I can live in the moral legacy I bequeath, in the principles I inspire, in the blessing I transmit. The God of my fathers will be the God of my children. I see them, like the house of Obed-edom, to the third and fourth generation busy around the ark of God, and I die in peace!"

Such are some, and only some, of the blessings of religion in the home. These are some of the living powers which centre in the ark of God.

Are we giving that ark entertainment? Is the blessing on *our* house? on *mine?* Is our home thrice dear and sacred because filled with the heavenly Fatherhood and Presence? If not, let us, let me see to it without delay. Let me draw down the waiting presence. Let me fill my house with love. Let me bring myself and all I have to Him who has given me all, that he may give me all again—that the Lord may now "bless the house of Obed-edom and all that he has."

Our Own Company.

And being let go, they went to their own company.—ACTS iv. 23.

PETER and John had healed a lame man. A great impression was produced, and a great number of people brought together. Taking advantage of the opportunity, they preached the gospel to the people. The rulers came upon them while so engaged, stopped their preaching, and sent them to prison. In due time they were brought before the Sanhedrim for full examination. They declared the whole truth without fear. The rulers, knowing that the miracle was real, and fearing to punish the workers of it, were content to "threaten them," and "let them go." And they, "being let go, went to their own company and reported all that the chief priests and elders had said unto them."

Now, it is a very happy thing, and we should be very thankful for it, that we cannot apply this language in any literal sense to ourselves. We are never put in prison for Christ's sake. We are never in any personal danger through our attachment to his cause. "The Lord maketh us to dwell in safety." We may teach, and testify, and work, and travel for him all the year

round, if we will, and not a hair of our head perish. "The shields of the earth belong unto God." One of the broadest and best of those shields is stretched over our native land, and every assembly, if convened for a legal and peaceful purpose, and every individual who respects the rights of the community, and the constitution under which we live, may do and say what they will.

If, therefore, we are to make application of this language to ourselves, it *must* be on some principle of accommodation—*i.e.*, the application must be a moral one. But is not that *the best* application of language? Is it not well—is it not scriptural—to rise from the literal to the spiritual? If we can take the mere outward scenes and incidents in the lives of the apostles and first Christians, and make them minister to our instruction and our spiritual growth, we make, at all events, *one* of the best uses of them of which they are susceptible.

Let us take, then, for present consideration, these ideas which seem naturally to arise out of the current of this text:—That we suffer a kind of imprisonment by circumstances. That there are occasional openings of the prison in providence. That when so released, we go to our own company.

I.

The first point is, that we all suffer a kind of im-

prisonment by our circumstances. This restriction comes to many of us largely from the necessity of toiling for our daily bread. The great struggle for life *must* be maintained from day to day. We and our children must live. And in order to maintain this life, we voluntarily give away every day a part of our personal freedom. We barter so much strength, thought, time, for so much bread. Now, we are not saying that this necessity is not, on the whole, a beneficent one; for indeed it is. We have abundant reason to bless God for work. And if we really love our children, I think we shall not be anxious to lift them above the necessity of working for themselves when their working time shall come. If circumstances are such with any that they are able quite naturally to leave their children when they die independent of any necessity for personal toil, they should be the more careful to imbue them with a taste for work in its highest form, to endow and invest them with a *habit* of working for the weal of others, and for the church of God, that they may never be smitten with the curse of idleness, or worse, lured and bound over to work for the devil.

This imprisonment at work is not only beneficent on the whole, but it is perfectly consistent with personal freedom in the truest sense. To be willingly *obedient* to the call and claim of duty *is* to be free. But still there is some restriction, and this restriction will be more or

less, according to the health, strength, temperament, taste, of the individual.

If the *whole* nature could be given to secular business, there would not be much imprisonment, if any. But that cannot be. If that ever comes to be, a man has a sad and dark outlook. Few things more ominous could be said of a man than this, that his whole soul, *all* that is within him now—all that is left there, is "stirred up," and carried forth into trade and work. That is indeed dreadful. But that is hardly true of any. And just because it is only *a part* of the nature of a man which can be so engaged—that part, however, taking for the time priority—and because the nobler part is for the time kept necessarily in silent attendance, therefore there is imprisonment. There is imprisonment every day of some of the highest faculties. Faith, hope, love, joy, can all indeed have exercise in work, but not their most perfect exercise. The fullest, serenest expressions of these high faculties is attained when circumstances are less exacting, and the soul is more consciously free. What a prison a great city is, and how many are in it with "hard labour!" A fine morning dawns. The air is all quivering with the richest light, and the earth with its fields and flowers is like one awakening to a gladsome day. You would like to seize the occasion, to accept the tempting call and wander away, to hear the gurgle of the country

stream, to see the bloom on the tree, the bird on the wing, the clouds floating so restfully across the sky. You feel, perhaps, that it would do you good to be receptive for one day of nature's fulness and beauty; to rest that part of your soul which is always working, and bring out some of those other parts which are less frequently engaged. But you cannot. You are a prisoner. You can look through your bars towards the large and wealthy place, but it is *only* a look. You must soon turn to your work. You have letters to write, engagements to meet, goods to sell—work to work of some kind, at which you must be until the clock shall strike the hour of release. Well, this is one chain—the chain of work.

There is another—the chain of habit. Not the chain of a man's own habits exclusively, nor indeed so much as the habits of the society and the place in which he lives. There are what we call the conventionalities of life, in which every man is more or less bound. These conventionalities are not at all dishonesties, insincerities, hypocrisies, as they have sometimes been represented to be. They are generally a fair product of the state of society at the time. They are the combined expression and partly the defence of a great variety of individual interests. They are the product of commingling lives. They are less—much less—than the full expression of some lives. They are more than the expression of

others, but they are, in the main, a pretty fair and honest expression of the aggregated socialized whole.

If our conventionalities were all away, some would be better without them, and some would be worse. Each, if brought out in his exact and true nature, would be somewhat different. So that all *are in prison by them.* We are, to a certain extent, slaves to our own necessary customs. We cannot get through. The bars are very strong; and the whole community is virtually pledged to keep them in repair. There is a great resentment sometimes felt against those who break through; and such attempts generally end in submission more or less complete.

Take for instance one of those social gatherings which abound at some seasons of the year. With all the freedom and the geniality which exist in them, there is also a considerable amount of reserve and restriction imposed by the mere forms of society. One makes an endeavour to be natural and almost succeeds; but cannot quite. The forms enclose him round and chill his opening affections back into silence. Another seeks to know his neighbour a little better, but with little success—the real man still escapes him, and goes home to be known far more perfectly by his little children than he is by the keen-witted friend, who was so desirous to guage and sound him. Another endeavours to speak out his real sentiments on some questions, without any

kind of deferential regard to the sentiments of the time and place on those subjects; but the astonishment of some, the evident moral pain of others, the expressed disapprobation, perhaps, of a third class, make him almost regret that he has spoken—and certainly a little less likely to speak again. And so it is that we are hemmed in by these conventionalities of our own making. There are very few who are not considerably influenced by them. There are none who can entirely surmount them. So that that is another chain.

And then there is the great strong chain of *law.* That is no doubt a grand safeguard of society—a great breakwater against the roaring surges of vice and crime. Law is altogether necessary for the weal of the state—for the safety and peace both of the community and the individual. But while it protects it restrains. It protects partly by restraining. It makes some men more virtuous than they would be, and others perhaps a little less. It prevents the pure outflow of the personal character just as it is, and causes it to flow to some extent along an artificial channel. A man could do some great good, and would, but the law forbids. He would only involve himself and others in difficulties and loss by making the attempt. Or he could do some evil, and would, without much compunction, if the law were out of the way. He has impure thoughts which might become actions. He has unjust longings which

might become fraud, if the law were not there frowning defiance and suspending penalty.

And thus are we in a kind of prison whose walls are built of the circumstances of our life. And we are bound with many chains—the chain of work, the chain of habit, the chain of law, and others besides these which we might easily name. There are many little chains of softer texture which we seldom feel as fetters, which yet have a great silent power in regulating the forces and the direction of our life, and keeping us from being openly and perfectly displayed in our real character. And so, amid these difficulties and disguises, our probation runs on, and our character is, day by day, acquiring that stamp and form and essence which will be manifest in due time—when the day of revelation comes. But meantime there are days and seasons of inferior revelation—when instant and strong disclosures take place of what is transpiring, or of what *is* existing within.

II.

There are in these environing circumstances, now and again, clear providential openings by which the real character is revealed—by which the real man himself comes out, for a moment, or for a while, and stands there in the light seen by others, or seen only by himself and God! A changing time is always a critical time, just because there are these openings in the wall of

circumstances—and because some time must elapse before the wall can be built again.

When the young man leaves home to come up to the great city, or to go out to a foreign land, how intense sometimes is the parental and the friendly solicitude! There are gushes of affection, and thrills of fear, and a shade of solemnity over the days. He was safe here with us; but will he be safe yonder where he is going? amid so many temptations, with so many opportunities! Will he not slide or perhaps fall? Oh, will *he*, his father's pride—his mother's joy; will he stain his youthful virtues, and ruffle the tenderness out of his heart, and fall into the hard worldly ways, and weep no more for sin, and perhaps learn to think less and less of Christ? Or will the change have a contrary effect? will it strengthen his will for goodness, and confirm his heart in piety, and draw him more clearly into the ranks of Christ's faithful ones?"

These are the searching solemn questions which arise in the hearts of the parents and friends in those days of separation, when he is just going away.

But why do they arise? Because it is felt that even at home that youth was not *fully* known. Because they are quite well aware that there are sleeping possibilities in his nature which other circumstances might draw out into actualities, and they are not *quite* sure how the scale might turn. Because they feel that even

home, with all its dear affections, and binding clustering sympathies, with its merry sports, and sunny days, and deathless memories, is a kind of gentle prison which may open its door at this time of outgoing, either into outer light or "outer darkness," which will send out its inmates either into higher or lower life.

A change of residence in later life sometimes operates in the same way. There is then a complete break up in one class of associations. The man has broken quite through the old charmed circle. The wall of cirstances has opened, and "being let go," he feels himself more free. Living in the new neighbourhood seems to bring out a new man. It may be a better man, or it may be a worse, who is thus brought out, than he was supposed to be where he lived before. But to a certain extent he is new both to others and himself. The gates of that social prison where before he was held in restriction, perhaps kept from ruin, have been opened, and he will shew himself more as he is.

The continental journey is another opening of the wall. Persons then go to places the like of which they would never think of visiting at home, and altogether feel a freedom which they would in vain seek for with the ordinary circumstances of life around them. We are not speaking at present about the rightness or the wrongness of the course pursued. The freedom may be rightly used in putting aside the chains of opinion, pre-

judice, and custom, as they exist at home; or it may be much abused. But it *is* freedom, and therefore develops some more of the *reality* of the persons than is usually seen in the walks of their home life.

Then again life as it goes on brings many opportunities for freer action and fuller display of the real inward man than ordinary circumstances permit. These opportunities are of both kinds. They are opportunities for good and for evil, for being true and for being false, for serving God and for serving the devil. To some they are "the gates of righteousness," into which they "enter and praise the Lord." To others they are but the door leading to an "inner prison," where their "feet are made fast in the stocks." But quickly they come, with their instant criteria, with their flashes of revealing light, and a man by the action of an hour, or of a few moments, delights or terrifies his friends, and stands in amazement at himself. And through these opportunities, these openings in circumstances, men "being let go," join their own companies.

III.

This is the third thing. In those testing those truest moments of life, when the old circumstances have dissolved, when new things are around us, when opportunities are fresh and living, when we feel comparatively free, the use we make of that freedom and

of those opportunities is this—that we then instinctively and involuntarily incline to go to our own company. Every night what multitudes hasten through the door of opportunity to their own company! The day keeps them in prison, the night brings release. Along a thousand streets the living multitude passes every night from the centre of the city towards the circumference, like life-blood streaming from the heart along the arteries to the extremities of the body.

Let us select two or three from the great multitude, follow them, and see what company they keep! Take that young man; 'tis he for whom so many prayers were offered, and so much anxiety felt some months ago when he left his country home. But he looks still fresh, and open, and true. Oh, yes, he is standing the struggle well. He is inclining more and more strongly to the right side, and now he is going "to his own company." Enter with him—there is *no* company there. There is the little table for refreshment which is soon over; then he takes down from among the books the volumes to the study of which he will devote these evening hours—and *that* is the company he keeps. He is smitten with the love of knowledge, and what is far better, with the love of Christ; and without having as yet any definite purpose, he thinks it is possible that he may be called to serve him, at home or abroad, in the ministry of his gospel. He is sure that he will have to

serve him in *some* sphere, and is resolved by study and prayer to make himself ready.

Or let us observe this young woman who has been busy all day with her needle. Blessings on her industry! honour to her virtue! peace to her home! To-night she is going to her own company *before* she reaches that home. There is to be a meeting for prayer, a great blessing is expected, and she must be there to ask among the rest.

Take another still, a man neither young nor old. There are some slight touches of care on his features, just enough to give some seriousness to a countenance which otherwise would be all sunshine and gladness. He has had what is called a heavy day; but, oh, what a lightsome welcome now that he is home! Little hands are soon in his, and little tongues are telling the wonderful things that have happened during the day, and the still more surprising things expected to be on the morrow, and smiles fall from another face, and there is a comfortable mingling of thought, and love, and sympathy, and heart with heart. The day opened to him the theatre of duty, the night thus brings him to "his own company."

Another; where is *he* going? Westward, but not out of the city, not even to any suburb, at least for many hours to come. On he passes along the busy streets under the gas-lights, until he comes to the flar-

ing entrance of the place where *his* company will be. With perhaps just one twinge of conscience he passes in, and *there* among the gaudy and giddy throng he sits for hours listening to the music, or watching the histrionic display. And these he says are the happiest hours of his life. Poor man, to have brought his life so low that *this* is its happiest and best! I am not saying that it is a sin to go into a theatre. I am not saying anything so hasty and unscrupulous. But this I say—gainsay it who can—that that man has reduced his soul to a pitiable condition when, having all this world to choose from, that soul "being let go," finds its own selectest company in a miscellaneous and mostly frivolous throng like that.

And others go to places still worse, which we cannot describe; to places where strong drink drowns reason and conscience; where sensibilities are scorched with the burnings of passion, where all tender memories are quenched, and all nobleness for the time is eclipsed, where there is the ruthless slaughter of every virtue, where the fires of Tophet are already kindled, where the guests are in the depths of hell, and *there* find "their own company."

But enough! Where do we find ours? That is the practical point to which we have been working. We shall say no more of *places* now, but speak only about

persons. Who are the persons in whose presence and society our souls find their best company? What is their character? What is their aim in life? What will be their end? Are they pure, honest, loving? Do they trust the Saviour? Do they serve God? Do they deny themselves? And do we love and associate with them for these reasons? In those releasing moments of life, when our souls get free, whither do they fly? Suppose we had been imprisoned with the apostles, and with them set free, should we have gone with them gladly and at once to their own company? When we are set free, now and again in the course of our own life, do we long for and seek fellowship with faithful souls and pure hearts?

There are but two companies in the universe. Even now there are but two, although in this world they are to us inseparably mingled. The division and separation is taking place by degrees. The gospel makes it. We ourselves make it in those selective moments of our life to which we have referred. But it will be made infallibly and visibly at last by the Lord himself, when the sheep shall be on his right hand, and the goats on his left, when all the good shall hear approbation from his lips, shall find home in his presence, and eternal joys at his right hand; and when the bad, those who have proved themselves to be bad by sinning on, rejecting Christ, despising the company of his people, and in al-

most every thing opposing his will, shall hear that awful word "depart;" and shall go away to their own company.

In view of the disclosures and solemnities of that great separating day, I would exhort you all to make Christ's church the place of your soul's rest, and the company of his people your solace and your preparation for the fellowship of the redeemed above.

But there is a still closer and better test; and it is this—"*What think ye of Christ?*" not of his people, struggling here, or rejoicing yonder in his own presence, but of Himself? Even his true people, while they have more to attract than any other company on earth, have also much to repel. Their views are sometimes erroneous. Their spirit is sometimes narrow. Their infirmities are many, and their shortcomings and failures are deplorable. *Through* all this human imperfection the image of Christ has to shine, the spirit of Christ has to breathe; and perhaps it is not surprising that now and again one should be found to say—and to say honestly—"I do not know whether I love these people of Christ or not. It does not seem to me that I should be much better if I did." Now, we *might* reply, and truly, "you are taking but a superficial view; unintentionally you are doing them great injustice. There is far more in them than *you* see, or *they* will profess. There is a solid goodness which will never melt. Remove the outward veil

and you will find the very image of Christ, and those principles and affections which will live and bloom in the sunlight of heaven." But let them be what they may, we have this better test—"*What think ye of Christ?*" The answer to *that* question will settle all, will decide whether we are for or against, whether we are good or bad, alive or dead, lost or found. If *any man love not* the Lord Jesus Christ, let him be Anathema Maran-atha. Oh, testing terrible words; but true and good like him of whom they are written. Is your soul seeking to have company with him? If so, then all will be well in time. He will wash away all your guilt, and strip off your imperfections, breathe love and goodness through all your nature, and make his image shine out from your soul. Then you will know your own company. Then you will prefer the fellowship of the true souls who love him, before the most intellectual companionships and the most brilliant society on earth. And then you will look forward with a sacred joy to that great gathering day, when the most august assemblage in the universe shall be convened, to be judged, to be justified, to be glorified in the glory of the Lord. Goodness and greatness will in the last resort be eternally allied. "God is light," and "God is love;" and his church will possess at last, in her measure, the same elements of glory which distinguish his own nature. She too will be light and love for ever. And while angels wonder.

and almost worship at the sight, who knows but another verse from this chapter may pass through the angelic ranks as a sufficient explanation of all—"And they took knowledge of them that they had been with Jesus."

Hearing and Doing.

For if any man be a hearer of the word, and not a doer, he is like unto a man beholding his natural face in a glass: for he beholdeth himself, and goeth his way, and straightway forgetteth what manner of man he was.—JAMES i. 23, 24.

THE objective thing which stands out to view in this passage is "The Word"—the Word of God. It is called also "the perfect law of liberty." The two expressions have the same meaning, and the thing meant is the whole revealed will of God. Or, if any limit or definition were put, it should be this—the gospel, considered especially in its *regulative* aspect—as inspiring and ruling the life.

Now the whole passage exhibits a striking difference, amounting to a complete contrast in *the results* which are accomplished in different persons who come into contact, more or less close, with this great "law," "word," or "gospel" of God. Some look and pass on, forgetting all they saw—just as one looks in a glass or mirror, and forgets his own image until he looks again. Others look, and have all they see so impressed on them, that they continue among these revealed things, having

the powers of them stirring in their lives, busy and blessed amid the "works" to which these powers move them. Now it is very important for us to consider what makes the difference. How comes it that there can be, that there *are* those two so very different ways of *beholding*, and results so different in the life? The passage gives us, both in direct teaching and by implication, much information on this subject.

Of course the difference might all be resolved philosophically, and truly, into *the state of the perceptive faculty*. There is a natural man, and there is a spiritual man. The natural man cannot see things in a spiritual light. The spiritual man cannot see things in a natural light. Each has his own visual power, his own discernment, his own world as the result. Nor is there anything that should be regarded as offensive or unreasonable in this doctrine, much as it has been objected to. It is but the application in the highest realm—that of spiritual existence—of a principle which has its operations in every other. In regard to poetry, painting, and all matters of taste and skill and beauty, no one would ever dream of putting all men on a level, or contending that one man can see just as much as another. It is not so. There is in regard to all these things what may be called, in a lower sense, "the natural" and "the spiritual." Many men are not *able* to see what other men behold at once. It may be their own fault that

they are in that state, but that is *the fact.* Through want of culture, thought, observation, care, they are in that state—and they "*cannot* know these things; because they are spiritually discerned. They must get, or cultivate the faculty, and *so* rise to the higher level. Now, of course, you might resolve all the difference which exists in the case in hand by a reference to that law. You might say that one man is "*natural,*" and another man is "spiritual;" and that that will account for all! No doubt that is true. But that is not *the* truth of this passage. The whole spirit of the passage takes us away from that truth. The apostle James not only makes no direct reference to that truth as containing the principle of explanation, he studiously avoids it, and leads us quite into another, and more practical sphere. He leads us rather to the question, "How it comes to be that a man *continues* to be 'natural,' when he has within him and around all the means of becoming 'spiritual;' and this, while another man near him ceases to be natural, and becomes, and continues to be, spiritual?"

Wherein shall we find the difference? The difference will be found in such things as these.

I.

There is a difference in the act or manner of looking.—The natural man looks into the gospel superficially,

the spiritual man more deeply. Some think that this difference is indicated in the passage in the use of the two words "beholdeth" and "looketh." The first word, "beholdeth," being only like glancing at the object, or gazing in a listless and unconcerned manner. The latter word, "looketh," meaning a much deeper and more intense gazing. In favour of this interpretation, it is certainly true that this latter word is the same as that which is used when it is said that the angels "desire to look," or "bend eagerly forward to enquire into" the things of salvation. It is perhaps impossible to say with certainty whether the apostle designed this difference of meaning by using two terms instead of one. There can be no doubt, however, that the difference does exist in fact, whether the apostle meant to express it in the words or not. That beholding of the gospel which is profitless is generally very superficial. It has no intensity. There is nothing in the look which pierces into the thing; nothing which apprehends it in its real features, or in any of its chief bearings upon the beholder. The gospel is there, and he is here. He is not drawn to it. He is not absorbed by it. His soul is at liberty, and he can go on his way, taking just a surface glance now and again at this great object as it comes into view.

Now this is a man who *can* look, and throw his soul into the gaze. He can look at an exhibition, at a

machine, a picture, a book, a system of philosophy, and so intensely and truly as to be able to tell you correctly the form and character of the thing which he has been beholding; and yet when he comes to contemplate, or at least to look at, *that thing* which throws all others into shade, he is smitten at once with a strange incapacity of vision. He can only look at the surface. He does not penetrate; he does not estimate; he does not consider; and *of course* he does not receive those impressions and influences which would purify and rule his life.

The spiritual and profitable way of looking at the gospel is very different indeed from this. It is earnest, penetrative, intense. A man looking well into the perfect law of liberty is as it were drawn into it, and draws it into himself. A man of appreciative taste looking at a famous painting, will feel himself drawn into it as it were. He will become in a degree unconscious of the things and the persons around. He will be standing in that highland glen! or resting in that sylvan glade! or dashing in triumph through that foaming sea! So a man, looking aright at the gospel, will feel as though he were drawn into it, and it into him! He will be received into the kingdom, and the kingdom into him. He will see *the King* in his beauty, and the land that was once very far off will be nigh at hand. If a Christian man in such a time of contemplation were required

to answer the question, "What things and persons are nearest you now?" he would reply, "Those things which God has revealed to me in his perfect law of liberty—sin to be struggled with, purity to be obtained, grace to live in, duty to do, a cross to bear, a fair heaven to travel to, and Christ the centre and sum of all that the heart can desire, to be worshipped, and served, and enjoyed for evermore." Happy he who looks *thus!* Not with the cold, clouded, profitless look which so many give to the marvels of the glorious gospel, but with that quickened and appropriating look which makes all the things that are seen for the time his own! All things are his for he is Christ's. He is clothed unconsciously with the splendours of the kingdom in which he dwells; he is dowered with the treasures which he cannot lose; he is titled with the rights and earnests of an "inheritance which is incorruptible, undefiled, and which fadeth not away."

That man will be blessed in his looking, and "blessed in his deed."

II.

There is a difference in the time occupied in the looking, as well as in the act of looking. The profitless look is not only very *superficial,* but very *brief*—"He goeth his way and *straightway* forgetteth." In the way he has looked he has not seen much to remember.

He has not seen the things themselves, but only a shadow of the things—in thick haze, or in lowering tempest; and so has looked away to other things. If a man were to sit down and make out a time-table of his own life, dividing and classifying his waking hours according to the several occupations in which he is generally engaged, and allotting to each *the time* that is spent in it, how much would be for religious contemplation, for "beholdings" of the gospel of God? Of how many hours, of how many minutes, in the week could some men say, "*This* time is spent in looking, not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen; for the things which are seen are temporal, but the things which are not seen are eternal?" In the case of some, the time would be found to be exceedingly brief. So that, when the looking is not only superficial but extremely transient, it is not at all surprising that the practical results should be scanty and poor. "As a man soweth, so shall he also reap." He shall reap, not only according to the quality of the seed sown, and according to the nature of the soil that receives it, but also in proportion to the time spent in the sowing itself. A husbandman is under the law of time as much as any other law. He cannot sow in moments what it will take him days to reap. The reaping takes longer than the sowing, but there is a fixed proportion. A man cannot go into his field in

spring time, and casting a few careless handfuls into the furrows, say, "Now I have done; now I shall have the weeks of harvest—work for all my reapers, sheaves for all my garners, food for all my cattle, wealth enough now for all the year!" But is not that just how some men act with religion in the allotment of the times and seasons of their daily and weekly life? "This little space for sowing, and all the rest for reaping!" Is it wonderful that in such a case the "harvest is a heap in the day of grief and desperate sorrow?"

God's pleading with some men—indeed more or less with us all—but with some men especially, in this busy age, is for time. "Give me time," he says, "or I cannot give a happy eternity to you! Eternity is the garner I am going to fill for you, but it must be filled with the fruits of your own sowing; and are these brief and fleeting moments, snatched out of the day, or perhaps only out of the week, all that you are giving to the sowing of the seed out of which the harvest of your endless life is to come? You are sowing *moments* and expecting to reap *ages*. You are sowing 'sparingly and expecting to reap 'bountifully.' You are feeding your soul as men feed their dogs, with crumbs from the master's table."

Now I know the answer which men make, and Christian men as well as others, to this kind of pleading. "It is a busy age. We cannot command our time.

It is with us a pledged commodity. We have been obliged to sell it for bread!"

The answer is, "You had no right to pledge it so. You must bring or take it back again—as much of it as you need for the highest uses of life. 'Will a man rob God?' 'Yet ye have robbed me.' But ye say, Wherein have we 'robbed thee?' As in many things else, so in time—in tithes, and offerings of the fleeting but precious time. Bring ye all the tithes into the storehouse—the abstracted hours—those hours which are sullied, and sickened, and wasted away with pleasure—and those which are loaded and almost broken down with unnecessary care—and those, above all, horribly lost in sin; bring them to me, that there may be meat in mine house, and prove me now *herewith* and see."

Here let it be understood that we ask for nothing high-strained or impossible. Religion is a reasonable service. Now I will put a case which has often been in your experience. You *are* very busy. And yet it has sometimes happened in your busiest time that a matter has arisen suddenly, one claiming instant attention. At first you have waved the matter away from you. You have said, "It is impossible, I cannot attend to that to-day, my hands are full." But the matter has come up before you again, and looked you still more boldly in the face; and meanwhile the importance of it has increased; and then you have seen that it *must* be done—

that if all else should be neglected *that* must be done. And you did it; and nothing else was neglected; a day that seemed *full* of duty, had room in it for a *supreme* duty; and that duty well done, imparted a higher character to everything else that was in the day, and the calm and rest of the evening were the sweeter for that happy retrospect in which *nothing* lay undone. It is just so that religion, having due time assigned to it, will come in not to enfeeble but to strengthen the toiling men —not to excite and waste, but to calm and purify, these fretful days. "Whoso looketh into the perfect law of liberty, and *continueth* therein, this man shall be blessed in his deed."

III.

There is another difference, as clear and as important as any that has yet been named—a difference, viz., in *the practical action taken as the result of the looking.* The careless looker—he who looks *superficially* and *transiently*—"goeth his way, and straightway forgetteth"—takes no action at all. Even with *his* looking, he saw that some action ought to be taken, and without delay. He looks in the glass, and sees spots on his countenance, and feels that these ought to be removed; but turning from the glass, he goeth his way, and straightway forgetteth what manner of man he was. And they are *not* taken away—not touched, or touched only so as to blacken them the more—touched with the hand which

is as vile as the face—not washed in the fountain opened for sin and for uncleanness. There they are, those plague spots of sin, vilifying God's image, darkening all the lights of beauty, and drawing to themselves, by sin's terrible attraction, more and more of this world's vileness. Then he comes again and looks at the glass, and sees that they are not much worse than they were yesterday, and "straightway goeth his way, and again forgetteth what manner of man he was."

In the clear glass of the gospel, some men in this way have seen themselves sinners a hundred times, and as often have gone away and *forgotten*. Nothing comes of the seeing: no action is taken.

Or another man comes to the glass, and sees—not himself. He has seen himself and his sinfulness so long and so often, that he is wearied and sickened now of *that* sight, and would not come to look in the glass of the gospel at all, if he might not hope to see *another* face—and looking, another face appears, a face majestic and calm, and beautiful exceedingly—no sin stains there! no wrinkles of care! no shadows of guilt! *That* is the face which has been haunting him in his dreams, and flickering with broken splendours upon his path at times as he has threaded the valleys of care. He hardly hoped ever to see that blessed face so nearly and so clearly. But here it is—shining in the frame or glass of the gospel—as clearly to his looking soul, as ever picture

stood before the eye. "The light of the knowledge of the glory of God shines in the face of Jesus Christ.' And that glory is the glory of grace. It is not merely that Christ is revealed in the gospel in his own purity and perfection—*that* would give no comfort. The beholding man might then draw back, like Peter, and cry, "depart from me, for I am a sinful man, O Lord!" But Jesus is revealed in the gospel with all healing and saving powers, with pity in his eye, with pardon on his lips, with full salvation in his hands. Now the man sees him so, hears the whispered "*come*"—"come unto me and I will give you rest." But, alas! lifts not a hand, although the hand of the Redeemer of the world is waiting to take it, if he would; moves not a step in advance, although that one step firmly taken would bring him into the Saviour's presence. He looks and takes no action. He beholdeth the most glorious sight which a looking soul can see beneath the sun, and "straightway goeth his way, and forgetteth what manner of man he saw."

Or he sees, rising up in the glass of the gospel, the picture of some one necessary sacrifice to be made, ere there can be to him any religious progress or any abiding peace, but he does *not* make that sacrifice; "he straightway goeth his way and forgetteth." Or the form of some supreme duty that is to be done, done first, and done now, if he is to go on to other duties which lie all

beyond it: but he does not do the duty. He leaves undone that one thing which at present above all other things he ought to do. "He straightway goeth his way and forgetteth." And so with other things. It is characteristic of the careless and unprofitable looker that he looks without acting. He has sights but no corresponding deeds. He has convictions, but no corresponding performances. He has feelings without decisions, longings without realizations, constant hearing of the word but no doing of the work.

On the other hand. He who looketh into the law of liberty with profit, looks that he may do. And does that he may look again with clearer eye. "He doeth the will of God, that he may know the doctrine whether it be of God." Suppose such a man, not yet an assured Christian, only becoming one. He looks and sees himself, covered as we all are by nature with the defilements of sin. And what does he do? Does he go away in forgetfulness, or does he lie down in despair? He does neither. He goes to the open fountain, and washes and is clean. Like Naaman, he may fret for a moment against the necessity, or against the character of the cure, but like Naaman, in the end, he goes down to the Jordan—to the appointed place of purification—and washes seven times, and comes out with flesh "like the flesh of a little child." Oh, the very angels might sing over such an one! "Thou art washed, and sanctified, and justified,

in the name of the Lord Jesus, and by the Spirit of our God!" And many such there be, who are constantly coming up out of the purifying waters of grace "*clean every whit*," and ready to be clothed, not again with "the filthy garments," which have been "taken from them," but with "change of raiment," with the new robes of grace, as they sing the new song of salvation, "Unto him that loved us, and washed us from our sins in his own blood!"

Or he sees God revealed in Christ. Christ as "God manifest in the flesh," radiant in his own perfections and yet overflowing with love to us, reconciling the world unto God and not imputing unto men their trespasses. But is he satisfied with *the sight?* No. He comes *to* Christ. He touches him that he may be healed. He trusts him that he may be justified. He rests in him that he may live. With him, "seeing is believing," seeing is coming, seeing is doing.

And so of every thing else, a required sacrifice is made —an incumbent duty is done—an opened path in providence is followed. And *so* strength comes, and purity returns, and the lost image of heaven. All who behold *thus*, as in a glass, the glory of the Lord, are "changed into the same image." "Whoso looketh into the perfect law of liberty, and continueth therein, he being not a forgetful hearer, but *a doer of the work, this* man shall be blessed in his deed."

Now there cannot be a better close of the subject than just this—the unspeakable importance of acting immediately on the views we have, and according to the feelings and convictions which arise in our hearts. It may *seem* a small point of difference that one man shall say "yes—in a little while." And another shall say "yes—and now." But in reality a larger point of difference could hardly be.

It comes to be the difference between good and evil, between life and death. If a man loves Christ he will keep his commandments. And the Father will love that man; and the Son will come unto him and take up his abode with him. If a man does *not* keep his commandments he does not love Christ, and that dread anathema which rests on every loveless soul rests now on him. What a stupendous difference; and yet here we seem all so much alike. You find no difference in song, we all sing alike; nor in prayer, outwardly we all bow to him alike; nor in hearing, we are all "hearers of the word." In these sabbath exercises every voice seems to say, "*I go sir;*" but to-morrow will tell another tale. To-day there is the hearing of the word; to-morrow there will be no doing of the work. No faith, no prayer, no self-denial, no setting of the face to heaven to-morrow. To-morrow again there will be the downward look, and the troop of earthborn cares, and snatches of the passing pleasure, and long forgetfulness of God. Oh what a

playing at religion is this! How it degrades the very preachers of it, turning them into "sounding brass and tinkling cymbal!" "And lo, thou art unto them as a very lovely song of one that hath a pleasant voice, and can play well on an instrument, for they hear thy words but they do them not." And how vast the dishonour done to Him whose ambassadors we are, whose gospel we preach, at the gate of whose kingdom we stand to invite you in his name to enter in! To dally so long with offers which ought to be accepted at once! To postpone the discharge of a great duty, which ought never to be put beyond the setting of a sun! Think of it. What will ye say to Him when ye meet him in his kingdom and glory? Who will be your intercessor with a divine intercessor despised and neglected? Who will save you from a Saviour's judgment? Who will deliver you from the wrath of the Lamb?

Now look again I pray you at his glorious gospel, with intensity, with continuance, above all with determination to act in divine strength according to the discoveries that shall be made to you. "Whatsoever thy hand findeth to do, do it with thy might." Work this work of God while it is day. "Now therefore perform the doing of it." "Behold now is the accepted time, behold now is the day of salvation."

As soon as this vital connection is formed between seeing and doing, you are in a state of salvation. Never

until then. Then certainly. That is the snapping of the chain which binds the soul to sin. That is the opening of the gates of righteousness. That is the actual uprising of the long-imprisoned soul and its forthcoming into light and liberty, while Jesus himself reads the charter of emancipation and gives it to all who thus escape. "If ye continue in my word then are ye my disciples indeed, and ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free."

And you may be sure that nothing less will ever bring freedom indeed. We must *come* into the light or we never can be the children of light. We must *walk forth* into liberty, or we never can be free. Israel must go out of Egypt with energy, in haste, by night. The Lord will not roll them out in Pharaoh's chariots. Peter must go out of his prison, although there is an angel there who has broken iron gates, and who could easily throw down the stone walls. "Gird thyself, and bind on thy sandals," said the angel; "and so he did." And so must we do the bidding of our deliverer, or we never can be free. Obeying and following him with promptitude we are "the Lord's freemen" for evermore.

From Glory to Glory.

But we all, with open face beholding as in a glass the glory of the Lord, are changed into the same image from glory to glory, (even) as by the Spirit of the Lord.—2 CORINTHIANS iii. 18.

THERE is a contrast drawn by the apostle in this chapter between the Old Covenant and the New, between the law and the gospel. The contrast is not doubtful, but clear and striking. In the qualities contrasted, there is a direct inconsistency and clear opposition—as between death and life, condemnation and righteousness, transiency and permanence. In the immediate context this contrast is drawn as between the darkness and bondage of the law, and the clearness and freedom of the gospel. No doubt the law held the gospel within itself, as an inner glory; but it was veiled like Moses' face when he spake to Israel. The gospel is the full shining out of that glory without any darkening cloud or veil (like Moses' face when he spake to the Lord), that men may clearly see, and that as they look they may be changed into the moral image and resemblance of that which they behold.

I.

The picture.—A glorious picture! "We all with open face beholding as in a glass *the glory of the Lord*." That is the picture displayed. The glory of God in Christ, or the excellence and beauty of the divine nature and purpose as they are revealed in the gospel. That is the picture on which we are invited to gaze. It is probably the most perfect picture in the whole creation. We have reason to suppose that nowhere else in the universe is there such another. In none of yonder worlds is there *such* a display of the perfections of the great Maker. The dwellers there, losing sight for the time of the nearer objects in those heavenly worlds, "earnestly desire to look" into the things of the earthly redemption. The supreme question in the politics of heaven is what God is doing with man. Possibly, indeed, the interest of heaven in this world is far older than we think. Shadows of sin and lights of redemption may have been seen by the angels in long prevision, mingling awfully with the common light and shade of this world's earliest days, and imparting a mysterious interest even then to God's natural works. Those works, however, of themselves, were at one time, and for long ages, the *only* picture of divine manifestation in this world. "His eternal power and Godhead" shone out on the face of nature when only himself and

the angels stood "beholding." His works were shewing him forth, and praising him as they could in this great temple-world, long before man, as high-priest, appeared. It is strange and grand to think that there was praise to God in those old times, sung by roaring seas, wafted by evening winds from the tree-tops of gigantic forests, flashed from sunny skies. And that old picture is not faded yet. It never grows dim. It never grows old. He paints it afresh every year. "He reneweth the face of the earth," and the growing grass, and the leafy trees, and the gleaming flowers, fill the air with incense to his praise.

But now, the apostle is making no mention of all this. He sees none of this glory by reason of another "glory that excelleth." He is in quite another region, one far loftier and purer than can ever be opened by the senses. He is in the realm of moral manifestation. He is comparing, or contrasting rather, one moral manifestation of God with another, an earlier with a later, an introductory and imperfect one with that grand fulfilling one which in this world can never be exceeded. The glory of the gospel shines over and through the dying glories of the law; shines also beside the living glories of the law. For we are not to forget that there are some respects in which that old Mosaic picture is a picture for *all* time. Some attributes of the Mosaic dispensation *must* stand for ever. Neither rolling years, nor the powers of successive dispensations, can at all affect

some of the things revealed by the hand of Moses. As a *moral* manifestation it is eternal. Dark and storm-like in some of its aspects, yet grand and glorious is that display. Nature for thousands of years had been telling the same things in the same tones, speaking of power, wisdom, order, goodness. But here on Sinai is another tale, and utterances of yet higher things. Here we have the proclamation of moral law, intended to take its place, not merely by the side of natural law but *above* it. We are told that the God of nature is true, is just, is holy—*perfectly* true, just, and holy. We are told that his dealings with man must be *according* to his nature, or, according to the principles of that moral law which is the transcript of the moral nature of God. In attestation of this, we have the altar of atonement, the bleeding victim, the officiating priest, the holy and the most holy places. We have a whole economy of sacrifice, every officiating person and every sacred rite speaking in some way of a God of holiness, and but *faintly telling the tale of mercy.*

Now the superior glory of Christianity appears chiefly in the *full* manifestation of the mercy of God, yet in perfect harmony with his justice and holiness. It fulfils, completes, perfects. Here God reveals himself fully, as fully at least as our circumstances require or our faculties permit. Of God's successive dispensations in this world Christianity is *the last*, and, therefore, according to a principle of divine action, comprehends the excellence

of them all. Judaism silenced no voice, quenched no light of nature; only kindled new lights and spake with new voices. Christianity, with a still larger tolerance, allows both nature and Judaism to utter speech and shew knowledge, and then adds her own supreme voices. She gathers all their glory upon herself, and then reflects it forth upon the world, mingled and intensified with that purer radiance which comes streaming from her own fountains of light and love. And this is "the glory which excelleth." This is the perfect picture. It so far exceeds every other, even of his own painting, in beauty and fulness, that the Apostle, although he might compare, takes the bolder figure and makes contrast. In his description he sheds this glory through the universe, and we seem to see everything else by its light. And, yet—that none may say "I cannot see, the light is too powerful, the vision is too large"—all this glory is enshrined in a living person. It shines on the face of a man. God is manifest *in the flesh.* Jesus Christ is the brightness of God's glory. Types had been set forth in former dispensations; they are lost, because fulfilled in him the great antitype. Different divine attributes had seemed to be in conflict; in him they are harmonized. Principles had been proclaimed; in him they are embodied. Promises had been given; in him they are fulfilled. Expectations excited; in him they are satisfied. He upholds righteousness and declares mercy He honours

law and expresses love. He shews God to be just, and yet the justifier of the ungodly. He is made sin for us, that we might be made the righteousness of God in him. 'Tis He who delivers us from the curse of the law, who justifies the sinner in view of all its requirements, who inspires the love of it in the sinful heart; who works all the wonders of grace in preparation for the wonders of glory. 'Tis all "*in him.*" His birth is condescension. His life is goodness. His teaching is truth. His suffering is atonement. His death is the centre of universal harmony. His resurrection is victory over hell and death. His ascension opens immortality and heaven. His session at God's right hand is the cause of this world's progress. His second coming is the hope, as it will be the joy and triumph of every loving heart. A glorious picture.

II.

The Beholders.—"We all beholding." "We," Christians that is. The whole context requires this interpretation. There is a sense, no doubt, in which it may be said, that all who have heard of the Lord Jesus Christ, so as to have anything like correct views of his person and character, are beholders of God's glory in him. All Christendom in this sense stands "beholding." Even heathen lands are turning to gaze. Light from the great picture streams over Christendom, penetrates the

darkness of heathendom, and men cannot *but* look towards a vision so bright and beautiful. But it is the doctrine of this, and many other passages in the New Testament, that a new sense is needed, what may be called a new soul-sense, by which to apprehend and appreciate spiritual things. "Spiritual things are spiritually discerned." "No man can say that Jesus is Lord but by the Holy Ghost." It was immediately after Peter's noble and most spiritual confession, "Thou art the Christ the Son of the living God," that our Saviour answered him, "Blessed art thou, Simon Bar-Jona, for flesh and blood hath not revealed it unto thee, but my Father who is in heaven." Paul, at the time of his own conversion, received this commission. "Rise," said the Lord to him, "and stand upon thy feet, for I have appeared unto thee for this purpose, to make thee a minister and a witness both of these things which thou hast seen, and of those things of the which I will appear unto thee, delivering thee from the people and from the Gentiles to whom now I send thee."—What to do? Not merely to proclaim a message and unfold a picture, but instrumentally to work in them a great change—"to open their eyes and turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan unto God, that they might receive forgiveness of sins, and inheritance among them that are sanctified by faith that is in me." Nothing but mistake and grievous injury will come to

us by trying to blink this great truth. Practically, the realization of it is at the very beginning of a personal Christianity. If a man does not believe it, he will not pray for the Spirit; he will not seek a *full* salvation from God; he will not be a root and branch Christian; he will say, "I can see, I can understand, I can reason, I can judge, I can choose, I can do." A man in this condition will hardly accept anything from God beyond good wishes. "Let him wish me well, speak benedictions over me, and watch me with Fatherly interest, while I work and triumph; but I can *do* all that needs to be done." Thus many men look at Christianity and speak about it as if they understood it thoroughly, and apparently without any suspicion of being affected by that spiritual blindness which hides the glory of it from their view. "Are we blind also?"

As we think this matter out, it will very soon shape itself into an alternative in our thought, which will be this—Either the enlightened and spiritual man is an enthusiast, or the natural man is essentially deficient, is spiritually blind. Either the one sees too much glory in Christ, more than is really there, or the other sees sadly too little. Who then is mistaken? Is the spiritual Christian an enthusiast? Has he fanciful perceptions of things which have no real existence? Is he gazing on imaginary glory? Is he setting up in his view an imaginary Christ? Is Jesus *not* "God mani-

fest in the flesh?" Is he not the brightness of the Father's glory?" the "chiefest among ten thousand," and "altogether lovely?" Are all those beautiful expressions of the Scriptures which set forth his glory and his grace, and which are so precious to spiritual souls, and precious to them especially in their best moments, are they all baseless and shadowy, a mere gilded cloudwork of the mind, little better than the phantasmagoria of a poet's or a visionary's dream? In that case our faith indeed is vain; our preaching doubly vain. The root of our hope is but rottenness, the blossom thereof will go up as dust. Ah! but who is not convinced that these expressions of the Scriptures, intense and luminous as they are, come far short of the reality? Who does not know that the most spiritual views of the most spiritual men are almost infinitely far beneath the real glory of the Saviour? He stands in a majesty which our largest reverence cannot take in. He shines in a lustre which our clearest sight cannot receive. He possesses a fulness of resource, and gift, and grace, which will overfill our enlarging capacity for evermore. The spiritual Christian then is *not* mistaken. In his highest appreciation, in his most rapturous worship, in his sublimest moments of faith and joy, he is not mistaken. He is living then! and *only* then. He is then walking in the light, and nearing the eternal day. But if he is not

mistaken the unspiritual man must be. 'Tis *he* who is walking among the shadows and turning from the light. 'Tis he who is blind and cannot see afar off. He is the prisoner who will not permit any opening of the prison door that the light might stream in. 'Tis he who is putting shadows for substances, forms for realities, little for great, mean for noble, temporal for eternal. 'Tis he who is looking with merely natural and carnal sight, with the dull glazed eye of unbelief upon that glorious being whom all angels worship, whom all Christians love. Surely, therefore, it is he who ought to say, "I am wrong, and I must, if possible, now be right. I have been blind, and I must now see. I do not stand with Christians "beholding." Their beholding is not my beholding. It is better, truer than mine. I must now reach their position if it can be reached. I must get their spiritual sense if it can be gotten. I must look, not with veiled, but with open face, to see the glory of the Lord, and *then* I too shall be changed into the same image from glory to glory.

A man reasoning in this way puts himself in agreement with the very mind and will of God. We cannot but know indeed that there are some who, professing to set forth the will of God in this matter, put it very differently. Their grand object seems to be, to demonstrate, with a pitiless logic, the essential difference between the seeing and the blind, and there an end.

There is nothing more to be proved, and nothing more to be done. Anything on this subject more unscriptural, anything more utterly ungodly, it would be impossible to express. What a dark mission it would be to go and tell blind men that they *are* blind, if you could not give them eye-salve, if you could not offer them sight; to tell prisoners that they *are* in prison, and that the door is shut, if you cannot also tell them how it may be opened for their deliverance. Is that preaching the *glorious gospel* of the blessed God? There is neither glory nor gospel in it. It is a doleful, deadening, wicked message, which never came from "the Father of Lights," which sickens or hardens the heart of the messenger, and which is at best utterly useless, but more probably injurious to those to whom it is given. No. We are sent to turn you from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan unto God. True we tell you, and we tell you because it is true, that you do not now look "with open face," but we tell you also that you may. True, we tell you that there is a veil upon your heart, perhaps far more than one, a veil of prejudice, passion, pride, unbelief. But who has woven them? Not he with whom is no darkness at all, and from whom no darkness comes. There is not a thread in the texture of any of them, however delicate, that has not passed through your own fingers, that has not been spun out of your own free thought and voluntary

action. *You* have woven them, and you keep them where they are. True also, we tell you that you cannot now in your own strength take them away. But we tell you also that God does not expect you to do so. He expects you only to do what is possible, pledging his own power for all that is higher, for all that is "impossible with man." But what *is* possible with man God will not reckon among the impossibilities. You *can* know your blindness. You can cry for light. You can look to him who gives it. You can take the eye-salve he sends and anoint your eyes that you may see; and if you will not do these things, then the blindness and the sin remain. But if, as we hope, you will turn your face towards the gates of the morning, if you will wait in prayer for the day-spring from on high, if, shutting out for the time all visions of earthly beauty, the perplexing sights of this fleeting life, you will look at once to the face of Jesus Christ, and ask the God of your life to give you a clear sight of the goodness that satisfies, and of the glory that never fades; *then*, as surely as there is a kindling in the east when the chariot of the sun rolls round; as surely as summer blooms when the earth turns her face to the sun, so surely shall you be light in the Lord. "His going forth is prepared as the morning." Purified as well as enlightened by the gladsome beams, you will gladly take your place among God's children of light, and say, in the language and

fellowship of the universal church, "We all, with open face beholding as in a glass the glory of the Lord, are changed into the same image, from glory to glory, as by the Spirit of the Lord."

III.

The Transformation.—We are "changed into the same image." Changed as we gaze. Changed instrumentally by the beholding into the image of Christ who is the glory of God. *A* transformation has taken place before the seeing, or in connection with the first sight, for "spiritual things are spiritually discerned." But another and a higher transformation takes place *by* the seeing. We gaze and become like that which we behold, like him whom we love. The spiritual apprehension we have, the vivid appreciative faculty within us transfers to us and fixes upon our souls the beauty we behold. This is a truth acknowledged by philosophy and everywhere recognised in the word of God. By perceiving we become. By knowledge, spiritual apprehensive knowledge, we grow in grace.

All this may be well illustrated in our common experience. Take any picture painted by the hand of a master. Such, for instance, as "the finding of the Saviour in the Temple." All kinds of people go to see that picture where it is displayed. But they do not all see the same thing; and very diverse results are pro-

duced by what *is* seen. Some stroll in because they *must* see it. It is one of the sights. But do you think that the artist would allow that they *see* his picture, as he himself saw it many a time in the process, and after he had given it the finishing touch? Not in the least. They see forms and colours, but not much more. They see Jewish doctors, and, as they expected, they are looking somewhat grave. They see a bending mother, and they conjecture that it must be the whisper of affection she is breathing into the ear of her boy. And they see that boy, his hand on his mother's arm, his eye looking up; and that is all. They have now seen it, and they look round to see the company or prepare to depart. They have *not* seen it. There is a beauty there which has not beamed on them. On the express artistic merits or defects of the picture, I say nothing. Let the critics settle these things among themselves, if they can. It is sufficient for the purposes of our illustration that the artist had an idea, that he meant the picture to have a soul with which the souls of the gazers might commune. Now it is that living soul of the picture which they do not find or feel. They lack the percipient faculty. These are the blind, and they go out as blind as they came in.

But others come with percipient and appreciative faculties as vivid and living as their own souls; they come with sympathies and feelings in harmony with those

of the painter regarding the picture, and what do *they* see? To them it is like a resurrection from the dead. It is not a cold dead painting. It is a living scene. What a strange learned wonder they find on the faces of those Jewish doctors! What a mingling and blending of human and holy feelings, love, veneration, almost sorrow, in the mother's look! And what unearthly light in the eye of that homely, beautiful, mysterious boy, who seems almost to speak the words, "Wist ye not that I must be about my Father's business?" But perhaps you say, "All this they bring with them in their previous knowledge of the scene, and in the moral sympathies they possess with any true attempt to depict it." No doubt this is largely true. We all, in a large measure, bring with us what we see in any thing. But then it is equally true that we are affected *by* the seeing. In the case we have for illustration, the transformation might almost be seen going on. The picture reveals its depths by degrees. The impression is deepened as the beholding is lengthened out. New ideas are caught. Fresh sympathies are born. Thus the artist, in proportion as his hand has been true, and far more in proportion as his ideal has been good, communicates his ideas, impresses his thoughts, teaches, trains, "transforms" the gazer into the likeness of that which he sets before him.

It is the same principle that operates in moral and

divine things. Most chiefly in this divinest thing, the glory of God shining from the face of Jesus Christ. "We all beholding, as in a glass, the glory of the Lord, *are changed* into the same image." We see the excellence, and share in it. We behold the beauty, and shine in it. We accept the truth, and possess it. All this is by established spiritual law. We cannot fail to get the good if we come with open face to the vision. If we gaze on the glory it will beam on our face. If we "look unto Jesus," we *must* be "light in the Lord." There is not in the spiritual economy of God a more beneficent or a more beautiful law than this. According to our looking so will be our getting. As we "behold" so shall we be. There are some people who are always narrowing down spiritual work to one point, the point of conversion. That is a point of infinite importance no doubt. Still it is but a point. There *may* be before, and there will certainly be after, that point in the history, a glorious transforming work of God, and God has fixed it so that this work of his shall go on always, and everywhere, when the means are used. Does a minister sometimes feel as though he were beating the air, as though every arrow fell short of the mark, as though each gleam of light he tries to cast on his subject, or to draw out of it, were swallowed up of darkness? This is his infirmity. No man can speak the gospel in fitting words, and with a heart which runs with the message—

no man!—from the apostle bright with inspiration, to the humblest herald of the heavenly tidings on cottage floor or wayside—without casting some light on believing souls, and probably on others around. On the same principle, no hour of sacred meditation can be in vain. In the serious entertainment of divine things the mind enriches itself, often more than it knows. These divine things are like royal visitors, they come with largess and gift, and they leave memorials of their presence which will be cherished and held for ever. I believe that Jesus Christ will not suffer one single look to him to be without due recompence and fruit. Nor one prayer to be without immediate answer. The larger answer may be delayed, or it may never come in the form desired. But there *is* an answer quick and true as the prayer itself. "At the beginning of our supplications" the commandment goes forth for our help. "Whiles we are speaking" we are heard, and answered too. And *so* "we are changed into the same image," and ever more and more. "From glory to glory," that is, from one degree of glory to another. It is the absolute and infinite glory we are beholding, and therefore the transformation can never be complete. But if we use the means it will go on without let or stay. The course of the Zion-bound pilgrim is "from strength to strength." "The path of the just is as the shining light, which shineth *more and more* unto the perfect day." So here.

"from glory to glory." It is the same gush of progress. It is the same note of triumph. Much may hinder, but nothing can stay. Through the rack of every earthly storm we shall see again that shining face. After every night-season of our souls, we shall hail that day-spring from on high which will chase away the mists and shadows. Then, at last, surmounting by death all earthly gloom and sorrow, we shall hear the watcher at Heaven's gate cry, "Arise, shine, for thy light is come at last, and the glory of the Lord is risen on thee now, to set no more for ever. Thy sun shall no more go down. Thy moon shall no more withdraw itself, for the Lord shall be thine everlasting light, and thy God shall be thy glory."

As we have borne the image of the earthy, and bear it now—groaning and burdened by it, soiled and shadowed with it, weeping and praying under it—yet always gazing upwards to the pure image of the heavenly; so shall we bear that heavenly image, that likeness of our Saviour's resurrection, that beauty of the Lord our God, which will then be upon us, and within us, through body, soul, and spirit, as we bask without fear in the very splendours of the beatific vision, and easily carry the "exceeding weight of glory."

IV.

The author and worker of this transformation is the

blessed spirit of God—"Even as by the spirit of the Lord." By his presence and agency this whole process of moral change is accomplished in human spirits. The change, as we have seen, is accomplished in conformity with the great fixed laws of God's kingdom. But being in itself a *vital* change it can be wrought only by the interposition of a living agent. It is not wrought by the picture. It is not wrought by the beholding. It is not wrought by any of the laws of the human mind, or of the kingdom of God; working simply of themselves. These are all instruments chosen and suitable, and necessary for the accomplishment of the high result. But the supreme and most essential power is that which is connected with the presence, in and through all, of the living spirit of God. He reveals the picture. He clarifies the eye. He vitalizes the spiritual law—and, wonder of wonders! he dwells in the soul he changes, and watches the great work from birth to perfection. As a builder watches the rising edifice; as a gardener goes tenderly among the growing plants; as an unforgetting mother yearns over her children, and keeps them lovingly day and night; so—only with a far wiser care and deeper love—the good Spirit of God keeps and nourishes the soul in which he dwells. He patiently builds again what we cast down. He heals the wounds we make. He washes away the stains of our daily life. He takes of the things that are Christ's

and shews them unto us. He leads us out of all our darknesses into the realm of gospel light and glory, where we are transfigured as we stand. He sets us before our Saviour's face, and we "are changed into the same image from glory to glory, as *by the spirit of the Lord.*" Let us have the idea deeply wrought in our minds that this whole dispensation of the gospel in which we stand is full of the Spirit of God. The dispensation is peculiarly his. I know that this world has never been without him. But his first comings were comparatively meagre and transient. There were but flashings here and there of his light; but gushings now and then of his fuller influence. Now the church is filled with his presence, and the world is filling too. Now the humblest Christian can see farther than Abraham in his clearest "looking" for the far-off city. The feeblest suppliant, who is sincere, has a richer anointing than that of Aaron and his sons. The most forgotten worker in the field, if working truly, is working in a strength grander and more invincible than that which shook the mountain or divided the sea. "Without measure" the Spirit was given to Jesus, and through him, as an infinite medium, he sheds himself without measure into the church. True, we receive only in measure, which is soon told. We are straitened in ourselves. The vessels we carry with our lamps are very small. But the Spirit's fulness is "*all* the fulness of

God." And it is so shed around us by the gospel in universal presence, that in a moment, at any time, by one quick thought, by one pang of love or sorrow, or one eager grasp of prayer, we can open our souls to all the fulness of God. And He can open those gates and springs which are farther back and quite invisible to our sight. He can touch those things in us which make our thought, and incline our will. He can "prevent us" with his grace and unknown presence, so that we shall "will and do of his good" pleasure. Let us be glad that God is so near. Let us fill our lives with his presence, and especially when we contemplate the glory of the gospel let us pray for his revealing light and for his transforming power. Then we shall see clearly, and shine in the beauties we behold. *Our* thoughts will be the Spirit's revelations. Our emotions will be the pure birth of his brooding love. Our prayers will be his intercessions; and as we stand "beholding as in a glass the glory of the Lord," he will draw off the darkening veil; give us the open face, make the glass quiver with the living light; and while he reveals the vision of eternity and the beauty of God, he will change us into the same image from glory to glory.

Pray for the Spirit, you who have never yet had his illumination or his grace. And let the prayer be a cry. For indeed you are crying for your life—for your dearest life. You can truly live only in God. If the Spirit of

God does not come and stay you can *only* die. In regard to all that is best and grandest in your life, you cannot live without him. But he is as free to you as to any Christian soul. If he *could* make a difference between one and another, surely he would hold himself in a diviner readiness to answer a *first* cry. He waits to come. He longs to come. He waits, not far off, but close and near—as near as the air, or the light, or the falling rain. He is burdened with the love of God, and longs to shed it in all fruitfulness and beauty over your sterile life. He is straitened with the baptism of your conversion—let it be accomplished. This is true. This is as true as Christ himself. You believe, you never doubt, that God *has* given his son. That is done, and the gift stands in human history and in human thought the central certainty of this world. But even that is not more certain than this —that God *will* give his Holy Spirit to them that ask him.

Growing in Grace.

Grow in Grace.—2 PETER iii. 18.

THE word "grace" has different shades of meaning in the Scriptures, but there is one generic and comprehensive sense which we can hardly miss, and that is the free and unmerited favour of God. Grace in God is God's love, his disposition to all benignity, his determinations to communicate the gifts of that love to the undeserving.

Grace in man is the fruit of this free love of God. It is the reception of it, the response to it, the reproduction of it, in the heart and life. The exhortation to grow in grace is therefore just an exhortation to increase and grow in every thing that constitutes true religion, in piety and practical goodness, in love to God and love to man.

Contained in the groundwork of this injunction, of course, is the assumed fact that we are *in grace* already —in a gracious and accepted state with God. No doubt the injunction of the text is fully and solemnly binding

on the natural as well as on the spiritual man. The growth in grace is for *any* man the most perfect development of his nature. It is more than our best ideal. But evidently we must *have* that in which we grow, and in the order of nature the having precedes the growing. First gracious, then more and more so. The planting, or the sowing, must precede the growing. If we are *rooted* then we may grow.

Also it is implied that we are not perfect in grace, that there is wide and ample room for growth. Surely we do not need to spend one moment in the proof of this. I never met with any person disposed to deny this. Any controversy concerning it must be largely one of terms. "We follow after, if that we may attain." We are emboldened by grace to seek the very perfection of God, but in our best moments we see it shining high and far, and we are glad to comfort our hearts with the thought that "he that hath begun a good work in us will continue it." There is room and there is need to grow.

Another thing implied is this—that we may and can grow if we will. In all such injunctions as this religious progress is set before us as a clear and practical possibility. God is not playing with words, keeping behind them tremendous reservations. He means us to grow. The injunction is as simple and direct as it can be. Then of course we *can* grow. To deny or

dispute this is to make God a mocker and Scripture a juggle. To raise the question of our inability is quite beside the mark. God knows our abilities and our inabilities; our dispositions and indispositions; the moral outflow and the moral recoil; and knowing all, he says, "grow in grace." Then the grace must be here, in which, and into which we *may* grow if we will.

Now, in the first place, I should like to be able to give some directions, or hints of a directive kind, for the discharge of this duty; and then, in the next place, to point out some of the strongest inducements to it. Direction, and Inducement, those will be the heads of our thought.

I.

Directions.—It is very necessary to have direction, and yet it is not so easy as it seems for one to give it to another. It is easy enough to speak of the general subject in such religious phraseology as we are accustomed to use; it is much more difficult to condescend to particulars with any wisdom or effect. How to grow in grace? That is the question. We cannot but remember that growth, to be real and healthy, must be free. It may seem, therefore, a formal and almost an impertinent thing to interpose directions at all. But in truth we do not interpose them—at least with any authority. We shall hint them, sketch them, bring them, such as they are, within sight, within reach. Use them if they

are suitable. If not, find other modes and helps more akin with your spirit's life. Only grow. Grow in grace.

Might not one try this among other things, at least for a little while—say for one week—that one shall take a strong morning thought concerning it! Let a man say to himself, "I live all my mortal life by days. I am now just going out on the field or track of *another* day. I am to live, am I not? graciously to-day. God has made all arrangements that I should. He expects me to live so. He will help me to live so. He will be grieved and angry if I do not so live! The arrangements for my living in grace could not be more complete than they are. There is a Saviour! There is a Holy Ghost! There is a covenant of grace ordered in all things, and sure. There is a whole kingdom of grace; and I, a subject of that kingdom, am just going out to live by grace through another day. I may; I must; and, God helping me, I will." Yes. And let the man think on a little longer in the same vein. Let him think as long as he prays in the morning. If there is not time for both, let him for once or twice omit the prayer and put the thought instead. And thinking thus, let him still say, "I must and will. This is the supreme thing. By *far* the most important thing I have to do to-day is to grow in grace. Nothing can take precedence of that. I may hear of something

to-day of the utmost importance in relation to the success of my business, the comfort of my family, or my bodily health; but it is yet more important that the hearing it should quicken me in the growth of grace. I may meet with some great loss, disaster, disappointment to-day, but with nothing that can hinder religious progress if I will, with nothing that will not help that progress *if I will.* There is grace for this whole day, for all its moments, transactions, events; and in the faith of this I thankfully and resolvedly go out with this as the supreme purpose of my soul—that I shall grow in grace." Let a man try that or some such thought every morning for a little, just as he tries a particular kind of medicine for some distemper of the body, and let him see how it will do.

Then, in the next place, let there be an actual arrangement of things, in so far as he has the power—of the employments and circumstances of the day—with express view to the accomplishment of this the supreme purpose. You may remember how God by the prophet brings it as a heavy charge against Israel, in one of their lapsed and corrupted times, that "they would not frame their doings to turn unto their God." They may have had occasional convictions, relentings, apparent returnings, but they would make no actual plan for recovery to be carried out immediately and heartily They would talk one way—act another. They would

look one way—go another. They would think one way —live another. They would frame everything but "their doings" to seek the Lord. Is it not too much so with many still? Thought, desire, purpose, or the shaping of a purpose, how often do they sink and vanish before they have taken the substance and body of action! All true thoughts should be clothed immediately in appropriate action, in so far at least as they are capable of such investiture. But especially a great ruling thought, like that of which we have just spoken, ought to have, without delay, a practical embodiment equal to its great import. If it *is* accepted in the calm morning hour, as the royal thought for the day, it must not be denied and dethroned, and sent out as a homeless wanderer, as the day goes on. It must "rule the day," as one of God's "greater lights." But you say no man can tell *what* a day is to bring forth; how can he frame the doings until he knows the circumstances? how can he rule the circumstances before they arise? The answer is, that if there be a sincere and fixed purpose to frame them *as* they arise, there will not be much difficulty. But, in truth, many a man can tell with considerable probability what is to happen during one day. He knows how things are cast, and how they occur and happen from day to day. He knows that this will help, and that that will hinder. He has it in choice to go out or stay in at a particular hour; to complete or decline some particular

transaction; to enter into conversation with a particular person, or to have himself otherwise engaged when the time for such conversation would arrive. In short, to a large extent he *can* "frame his doings" so as to carry out the best and noblest thoughts he has, so as to live in grace and serve a gracious Master.

It is impossible to forget that, to a large extent, our doings are framed for us. We are all servants more or less. But let a man be like Canaan, "a servant of servants," if he is a *Christian* man, he *has* the rule and mastery of his own life, so far forth as this, that he can live graciously and grow in grace day by day. Any circumstances that do not admit of being so "framed" are to be broken like fowler's snare, or bondman's fetters, that the oppressed may go free. In short, we all have a power to order our own life, to guide its days, to mould its circumstances, to frame the doings with which we fill it *so*, that they shall express, and at the same time help on to good effect, the great purpose of the soul to "grow in grace." May God give us wisdom and strength for "our goings out and comings in, from this time forth and even for evermore."

Another directive hint is this. If in the general review and arrangement of the life, some things are found, perhaps in the very structure of it, or hanging closely to the structure, which are seen to be hindrances, then let them be laid aside without reserve, without

delay. "Lay aside every weight." A thing may not be a sin, and yet it may serve the sinful cause as effectually as if it were. If it is a "weight," it will hinder the growth in grace. If you planted apple trees in your orchard, in the hope of feasting your eyes in a while with their wealth of blossom and heaping your baskets with the sweet-smelling fruit, would you hang weights on the branches to see how much they would bear and still grow? Would you gather up the withered branches, and hook them on to the fresh green ones? If you did they might not kill them, but would they not mar the beauty; would they not hinder the growth? Or if you ran a race, would you carry stones in your hands, or bags of gold about your person? You might; and you might carry the stones with you through the whole race, and have your gold safe then; but you would not have the crown, the thing for which you ran. 'Tis sometimes no easy matter to lay aside these weights, but if we really want to grow in grace it must be done. They are pressing too heavily on the springs of life. It may be a weight of money; your soul is not strong enough to carry the money you have gotten, and is bending under the weight. It may be a weight of toil and care; you have too much occupation for your soul's health, and that by your own arrangement. It may be a weight of respectability, with which some people are wonderfully burdened: they can scarce trust themselves

to sound sleep, lest, when they awake, they should find some of it gone. It may be a weight of pleasure; nothing will more certainly, or more quickly, soften and melt away the true soul-strength than pleasure sought and enjoyed for its own sake. It may be a weight of indolence, nature's sluggishness wrapping itself about the faculties, or floating in upon them insensibly like the drowsiness of a sweet summer day, and composing all to sleep to the old tune, "Soul take thine ease!" Whatever it is, when felt and discovered it should be at once flung away. At once. Here haste will be wisdom, and moral impatience the highest virtue. Lay aside every weight, and let thy soul mount up as on the wings of an eagle, and "run and not be weary, and walk and not faint."

It may seem to be hardly necessary to say anything regarding the renunciation of *sin* as such. A gracious person it may be thought will certainly be against every thing he sees to be sin. "He cannot sin," says the apostle John. But, says the apostle Paul, he can. And there is no discrepancy between the sacred writers. We had best take no shelter in any theory, but watch and be sober. If we cannot sin, it is because the seed of grace abideth in us. And if that seed abideth truly in us, it will breed many watchful thoughts and holy purposes. It will breed especially *this* purpose, as most agreeable to a life of gracious growing; a purpose of

unbroken wholeness to oppose, vanquish, renounce *all sin.* "Lay aside every weight—and the sin:" the sin especially which easily besets, the sin that is little, that smiles, that is near, that might almost be put among your virtues for any harm it would do them! Lay it aside, I say, and not as you would drop a weight, but as you would cast a serpent out of your bosom, or a cup of poison from the table where your food is spread.

We have spoken of hindrances both slight and serious. Now let me say, that a man should hold himself ready to *take all gracious helps* for gracious growing. These helps are manifold and very near; and they will be quick and effectual in their operations if we are ready. It is therefore exceedingly important that the soul should be in a receptive state. Everything about the kingdom of grace is in such a state of readiness, that *in a moment* God can give help, if the soul is prepared to take it! Just when you are grasping your friend's hand! Just when you are lifting the burden and thinking of the weary way! Just when you are reading the letter and wondering what the answer must be! Just when you are crossing the street, before you are over, the help will come, if you are ready, and you will "grow in grace."

Or left at home (I speak now to mother, or sister, or wife), just in a moment to you also the help needed will come, if you are ready! When you feel that the watch-

ing by the sick, although the dearest occupation of your life, is yet wearing away your strength too fast! That the anxieties of a rising family are very heavy! Or that without any family, or any very visible cares, the day yet sometimes grows dark and the way dreary—be ready—be receptive; and the grace will come and you will grow.

Now, to be ready does not mean having an assemblage of great thoughts in the mind. It does not mean having the feelings or the frame of the heart in a theological or so-called evangelical state. It means being humble and looking up with desire to God. 'Tis *this* feeling—"To-day, whether I go out or stay within, I shall very much need help; let me be prepared to take it when and as it comes!" That very feeling of humble expectation and desire will bring it, and you will grow in grace.

One more hint only we have time to place among the directions, before we go on to the inducements. In some respects it is the most important of any. It is this. That we should maintain a constant connection with the fountain-head of grace in God, by every thing which constitutes prayer. By prayerful thoughts, lookings, longings, askings, we should keep ourselves in vital union with the God of all grace, and so draw from his all-sufficing fulness for the supply of continual need, and for the growth which he rejoices most of all to see.

Very directly, very simply and earnestly, we should ask that we may receive; we should seek that we may find; for he that asketh receiveth, and he that seeketh findeth. God's windows are open. God's fountains are flowing. God's lights are streaming, and his vital airs are breathing forth, and every prayerful spirit will catch a double measure of those heavenly gifts and treasures as they come.

II.

Inducements.—The first is *the ease* with which this growing can be accomplished when we heartily incline to it. There are many difficulties, yet there will not be very much difficulty in surmounting them all, if we but resolve to give the principle of gracious vitality within us free scope, so as to bring it into full contact with the gracious *conditions* of life which God has put around us.

Growth in the natural world is one of the most wonderful things we can behold, wonderful especially for the ease with which it goes on. Man can do nothing of any importance without bustle, and strain, and noise. If he is only building a cottage, or erecting a booth in the field, or only planting a shrub or a little flower, there is the sweat of the brow, the stretching of the muscle, the swing of the instrument—all the signs of labour and effort. When God works, in the clothing of green fields, in the colouring of flowers, in the building

up of lofty oaks, you see no movement, you hear no noise. It is a mystical, but a beautiful thing, the growth of the natural world; beautiful not only in the forms and colours which it throws out to our sight, but impressively beautiful in the calmness and ease with which it is all accomplished.

You have no need to work *upon* the growing thing, whatever it be—seed, or flower, or plant, or tree. You have only to see that the conditions of healthful life are around it, and then—without your leave, without your looks, and better in your absence than in your presence—the living thing will grow.

'Tis even so in the spiritual growth. When all the best conditions of that life are around us, the growing itself is an easy thing. The difficulty, strictly speaking, is not in the growing, but in the strife with malign conditions of our own making. If we would but hold ourselves in simplicity in the garden of God, and abide where we are planted, by his rivers of waters, the fruit would be in season, and the leaf would never wither.

Another inducement is found in the principle of necessary growth which belongs to every rational soul. We *must grow* in *something*, and if not in grace, you know in what the growth will be. You see a "beware" in the verse before the text: "Ye, therefore, beloved, beware, lest ye also, being led away with the error of the wicked, fall from your own steadfastness." And now,

when you see the danger, how are you to act to avoid it? "Grow in grace." That will keep you safe and well—in the right faith, in the right practice. The connection between these two verses is most instructive. Do not fall into error: Do not go away into sin: and that you may not—grow in grace. Is it not implied, that if we fail to do the latter, we are almost certain to do the former. If we do not grow in the grace, we shall grow in the heresy, in the passion, in the sin. Heresy, in one view of it, is a misdirected faith. It is especially so in the case of a Christian. He has used his soul to believing. He has got it into that blessed habit. The soul of a believer must have *something* to believe? and, if the truth is not given in proper measures for growth, it will lay hold, with all the force of an insatiable instinct, of the error that is nearest and fairest seeming, and try to grow on that.

So passion in a sense is but misdirected zeal and love. It is especially so in the case of one who has had, or may have still in weakness, the true affections. The desire a man has to some pleasures which in themselves are poor and transient, even the relish he seems to have for things that are sinful—what are these but love, the undying love of his spirit, drawn away, degraded, and made impure? Thus, we *must* grow in something. The winds must whirl about in their circuits. The sun must hasten to his going down. The rivers must flow back to

the sea. Time must roll itself on without any stay into the bosom of eternity, and *we must grow.* If we do not believe the truth and grow in that, we shall soon be heretics, holding fallacies, believing lies. If we do not love the Lord Jesus Christ, and grow by that pure and infinite affection, the longing unportioned heart will soon have another in his place. It will wind itself, like the ivy, around anything that comes, be it no better than mouldering wall or rotting tree, rather than live in vacuity, or sink into utter negation. We *must* grow; then let our growing be (since through grace it may) in lily-like beauty, in cedar strength, in "smell as Lebanon."

Every other kind of growth is uncertain, limited, transient. Natural growths may go through their natural courses; or they may not, for a thousand accidents may happen. But even if they do, what are they all in themselves, as to substance and continuance? Are they not fitly described in the language which is applied by the sacred writer to that life around which they grow? Are they not, as morning flowers cut down? As vapours appearing for a little time and then vanishing away?

Physical growth is a fine thing when the bloom is on the cheek and cubits are added to the stature. But what is it when the eye grows dim, when furrows are deepening in the brow, and the locks are snowy white, and the staff must help the steps of the old man totter-

ing along the smoothest road? What is it when the sexton has dug the grave, and when the coffin, containing all that remains of the growing of so many years, is let slowly down, while "earth to earth, ashes to ashes, dust to dust," breathing sadly through the air, tells us that another journey is ended, and the traveller laid in sleep where "the weary be at rest?"

A growth in possession of the property of this life is a fine thing while house is added to house and field to field; while the balance of trade is in the man's favour, and higher and still higher figures are needed to express the sum of his wealth. But what is it when the "wings" are made to the riches, and the man sees with trembling that the riches *might* take the wings? What is it when they *have* taken them, and are flying, like a bird seeking another nest? Ah, what is it then?

Or what is it if the increase goes on until the dying day, and the man on the morning of his death can write larger figures to express his property than he ever could before? One expiring sigh turns them all into a cipher. The last feeble breath can blow millions of money away. "We brought nothing into this world, and it is *certain* that we can carry nothing out"—not even ourselves. We must be carried—wealthiest merchant and mightiest monarch as much as poorest beggar—to our "long home."

And so of everything else, every other natural thing

in which men grow. There is a bound to all natural attainments, and when that bound is reached, decay and destruction come in to feed and riot upon the good things provided. There comes a time when the strongest man cannot move a limb; when the richest man cannot distinguish the copper from the gold; when the most learned man cannot speak a word of his mother tongue; when the most famous man cannot hear a whisper of praise; when the most honourable man has the badges of his rank laid on his coffin. A time when the most patriotic is without a country; the most affectionate without a home; when all growth has fallen to decay, and all that constitutes the natural life of man has sunk into the cold embrace of death.

But growth in grace is for ever; there is nothing in grace which indicates, far less necessitates, decay. It is for every place, for land and sea, for earth and heaven. It is for all time, now and evermore. It is for the whole nature of man, body, soul, and spirit. It is for all his circumstances, be they as changeful as the waves of the ocean or the clouds of the sky. The growth in grace is the only one not subject to decay and death. It has a vast assimilative power which *nothing* can resist. It feeds, therefore, on all the elements of man's life, on all the chequered experiences of his days. It feeds on joy; it feeds on sorrow. It rises by nature's growths, but does *not* sink in nature's decays. The out-

ward man may perish, but the inward man is renewed day by day. Days of sorest sickness fill the springs of immortal health; and day of death in the vocabulary of grace is but the earthly name for the first day of eternal life. Grow, then, in that which must for ever grow—in that which will always be grace, although it will soon be glory, and always fresh and living as the beauty of the Saviour, or as the thoughts and affections of God.

Faint, yet Pursuing.

Faint, yet pursuing.—JUDGES viii. 4.

GIDEON, with his brave band of three hundred men, was in pursuit of the flying Midianites. He had struck a sudden blow with a very wonderful effect. He had won the victory not with sword and spear on a hard-fought field, but with trumpets and shouts, and the flashing out of three hundred lights from broken pitchers. But the victory won thus easily was yet won by brave men, who *would* have fought if their leader had brought them hand to hand with the enemy. They are hasting on to fight, if need be, now. Every term of the sentence shews their courage. "They came to Jordan." Men less earnest in their work, and less brave in its pursuit, would have paused there, would have said, "Here is a natural barrier. Here let us end the chase. Now God gives us safety and rest!" But "Gideon came to Jordan *and passed over;*" passed over, not in strength, but faint, "faint, yet pursuing." He had an end to accomplish, and as long as he could lead the way, or his men could follow him, he would march to that end.

Now these words of course have another and a higher meaning to us to-day. Rather, perhaps, a higher meaning than another. We are using no violence to the text in giving it a spiritual application. We are only giving it expansion and elevation. Indeed, it is a singular testimony to the grandeur of spiritual religion, and to its just supremacy in human affairs, that it can thus so easily gather up historical facts, and put its hand on common things, changing them or brightening them into symbols and images of itself. These three hundred men dripping and almost fainting on the eastern bank of Jordan, with their valiant captain at their head cheering and leading them on—are they nothing more to us than three hundred common men? They are far more. They are a prophecy, an image, an illustration of every true Christian's life, of the progress of every earnest spirit through the toil and conflict of this mortal life towards the victory and rest which have been promised at the end of it.

Faint! Is not this at one time or another the experience of every striving God-seeking soul? If it has not been your experience of late, if it is not your experience now, then rest you while we speak; or, better, give us the help of your strength, in sympathy with the weak, and in prayer for their strengthening.

Are there any analogies that we may use for illustration between the faintness of the body and the faint-

ness of the soul? I think there are. Of course, all bodily sensations fall very far beneath the measure of the soul's life, can typify only *some* of its experiences, and these but imperfectly. But, so far, we can take the outer life as giving us some true indication of the states and experiences of the inner.

I.

Faintness comes to the body by long travel.—These men had come a considerable distance, and distance will vanquish the strongest in the end, if there is not adequate renewal of the strength by food and rest. Even Jesus "was wearied with his journey, and sat thus on the well." Every step we take is waste. Every movement of hand, or foot, or muscle, is waste. Every breath is waste. We breathe, we walk, work, burn our bodies away. Literally so. The outward man *is* perishing day by day. And it is well for us that it is so. For when the outward man ceases to perish, we cease to be in health. That part of our frame which does not properly perish makes disease. In this world we are well only when we are dying. But the perishing, of course, requires recruiting and replenishing, and if in our physical life we go on spending without receiving, then comes faintness.

It is so with the soul. There is a mysterious spending of its substance and vitality, day by day, in thought,

emotion, will, effort. A Christian soul spends more than another because it has more to spend. It has higher thoughts, and more passionate emotions, and nobler efforts, and more fervent willing. And if, through long travel, the waste is more than the recruiting, then comes faintness. Perhaps this may be the reason of your weariness. I do not say it is. But it may be you have come a long way in the divine life. This ought to be true of you if the almond tree is beginning to flourish and the grasshopper to be a burden. These are the late autumn days with you, and you ought soon to be fully ripe. But this may be true also of some in youth. "A long way in divine life? That cannot be with me. I hardly seem to have started. I seem to be still only breasting the first little hills of the journey. Still you may have come a long way. Some souls pass over long spiritual distances before they ever seem clearly to begin to run the spiritual race. You are looking at the moral end of your high calling, and that of course is high above you and far away. You seem hardly any nearer it than when you began. But you will always seem far from that, even when the whole course of your spiritual life on earth is closing. In looking at that end, if you regard it rightly, you are looking across moral infinitude, and of course your progress will not seem very great. But now, if you were to turn and look back, as a man does after toiling from morning till noon up a

steep ascent, and if you *could* see all the way you have come, you would be joyfully surprised. You would say, "Have I come so far? then I will not be discouraged. I will lift up the hands which hang down, and these feeble knees; and make straight paths for my feet, lest that which is lame be turned out of the way; but let it rather be healed." There is a sense in which we never can tell how far we have come in divine life. That is really one of the deep things of God. We may judge our moral state correctly in the main according to the great principles. We may try and judge ourselves by the perfect standard, with considerable approximation to truth. But we shall not find out in that way, how far, in time, we are, on the one hand, from the beginning, and on the other from the end. Or in experiences either. I verily believe that many a soul has made long and toilsome journeys, and is "faint" in consequence, without being clearly conscious of much progressive change. There *must be* a great moral progress, but God only knows how much it is. It has been made in many cases amid difficulties so manifold, and amid moral contradictions so perplexing, that nothing but the measuring-line of omniscience can cover the distances and reveal the results. God takes forty, fifty, sixty years, for the ripening of one soul. He takes seven, three, or only one for the perfecting of another. He gives much suffering to one, very little to another. He makes the way hard,

and rough, and toilsome for one; smooth, and green, and flowery for another. And no man can find out God's way. No man can measure God's work clearly in the soul of another, or even clearly in his own. You have not been long in divine life, and yet for this world you may be near its end. You still hear the hum and the clangour of the earthly voices, and yet the sweet celestial music is just about to break on your ear. You toil and pant through the feverish air, and as you look on this side and that, the desert still seems to lie far and wide around you, yet the promised land is but a little way before; you will be in greenness, in shade, in eternal rest, ere long. You are "faint," but still pursue, and ere long you shall arrive in peace and triumph at your journey's end.

II.

Faintness comes to the body by rapid movement.—These men had come fast as well as far. A man shall walk leisurely over some miles of road or up the slope of a mountain, and be quite cool and comparatively fresh, while a racer shall bound away over the same distance, and at the end be panting with exhaustion. A man shall glide through smooth waters at his leisure, hardly touching them with his oars, and be as calm as the surface of the lake on which he is floating, although he has floated many miles. A rower shall stretch every

nerve and almost crack his sinews with the effort, and when he has conquered the same distance be almost spent. If a man will lift up his bodily energies to contend against time and space, those invincible powers will sooner or later lay him panting on the turf. It is so in this respect also with the soul. If a man will contend with all his spiritual energy—with aspiring affections, and in the full fervours of a living will, against God's kingdom of heaven, against moral perfection; if he will match himself for that attainment, run in that race, climb that awful steep, he need not be surprised if now and again he is fain to pause and cry with one who ran eagerly long ago, "I have seen an end of all perfection, but thy commandment is exceeding broad." All earnest natures tend to go by rapid movements, and are in consequence subject to sudden exhaustion. The fainting is the natural fruit of the effort. You know that it is so. You know that some are eager, and anxious, and full of moral impatience. They want to settle intellectual difficulties that trouble them *quickly*. They want to know certain things clearly. They want to feel as they know; and to act as they feel. They are striving eagerly for moral correspondence and harmony, and fulness, and fervency, and strength. If they did not strive for these things *eagerly*, they must cease to strive for them at all. That is the way they do every thing else. They read books, and

take up opinions, and look at pictures, and form friendships, and do daily duties earnestly. For them to profess to be religious, calmly, would be a hollow pretence. They must "so run that they may obtain." They will not, if they can help it, suffer themselves to doubt of success. They will not even brook delay. Intellectual difficulties can be solved. Moral mysteries can be explained. High attainments can be made. Firm footing can be won—that is their faith. And it is, on the whole, a true faith. "Flesh and blood hath not revealed it to them, but the Father in heaven." It is God himself who inspires them with this divine unconquerable impulse to rise and grow and press forward to the perfection he has shewn them. But God does not shew them beforehand the hindrances, the difficulties, the delays, that are coming. And *when* they come they are discouraged. They grow weary, and faint while pursuing. Intellectual difficulties will *not* melt away. Moral mysteries will not disappear. The law of sin in the members will not die. The law of the spirit of life will not grow so fast, will not bloom so fair, as was hoped; and the panting, eager spirit, after many ineffectual endeavours, is sometimes almost benighted with the gloom of such disappointments, and sinks down fainting, almost ceasing to pursue. There is nothing very alarming in this weariness. It will soon pass away. You have not lost your ideal, nor your love for

it, nor your purpose to realize it, nor that divine hope which kindles itself always by the side of a holy purpose, nor that prophetic faith which counts the thing that is not yet as though it were. And if you have lost none of these things, you have lost no real strength. It will recover and revive ere long, and bear you on again to moral victory.

III.

Faintness comes to the body by the *difficulty of the ground* that has been trodden, or of *the work* that has been done. Those men would not take the easiest, they would take the directest way to their end. A mile through tangled thickets or thorny brakes, over rough rocks or in sinking sand, may be more exhausting than seven or ten over the smooth green sward, or along the level way.

Two travellers start in the morning from the same place, and they come in at night to the same goal. Perhaps they are men of almost equal strength, and yet one is fresh, glowing, animated, full of the delights of the journey; the other is haggard and spent, and says he will tell you some other day what he has passed and what he has seen. The difference is all explained by this, that the one went by the way of the plain, and the other went by *the mountain road*, the toils and dangers of which no man can tell who has not dared them.

Some Christians go to heaven by the way of the plain, and some by the mountain roads. It is very pleasant to see and speak with the travellers by the plain, who go by easy and well regulated journeys, who have little dust on their garments, little weariness in their step; who never think of fainting, for they tell you, and tell you truly, that the way to Zion for them is to go gently on from strength to strength; that "wisdom's ways are ways of pleasantness, and all her paths are peace." It is not always so pleasant to see and speak with the mountain men. Perhaps their garments are torn! Perhaps their hands are bleeding! Perhaps there is a strange darkness gathering on their faces! Perhaps their speech is strange at times! They do not understand their way. They *tell* you that they do not understand it, that they almost despair sometimes of getting over the hill, almost doubt sometimes whether there is much to get over to. They are "faint," and hardly "pursuing."

Who can tell why one is sent by the mountain and another by the plain? why one smiles and sings all the way, while another sighs and weeps? We only know that it is so, and that He who is "Leader of faithful souls, and Guide of *all* who travel to the sky," can make no mistakes, has no malarrangements in his providence, knows exactly where every pilgrim is, *why* he is there, and when he may expect him home. We only know that

the mountain roads to the land of rest are not deserted yet, nor likely to be so soon. For all I see, there are as many difficulties in the lives of some good men, when they resolve to "live godly in this present world," as there ever were. If these difficulties are not so rough as once, they are yet more subtle. If they are not so terrifying to the sense, they are quite as exhausting to the soul. There is still a very large company of whom it might be said, "The soul of the people is much discouraged because of the way." You who are going by the plain, and you who are pretty well over the hill, go on your way with songs. Speak well of him "who always causeth you to triumph," and who throws all your lines in pleasant places, but do not forget, and never despise, those who are toiling through the rougher ground and the darker places, and who can sometimes do no more than sigh forth the sad complaint, "As for us, our feet are almost gone, our steps are well nigh slipped." "We are faint and hardly pursuing." I say, look at them well! Think of them well, and let your heart draw near to them. They are heirs with you of the inheritance. You will stand together in a while, and to some among them on that day the higher place may be assigned, the brighter crown may be given, because they strove so much and so well, because even *while* "fainting," they still "pursued."

IV.

Faintness comes to the body *through lack of sustenance.* There can be little doubt that Gideon's three hundred men were hungry, and therefore faint. In times of famine or scarcity, you see persons the shadows of what they were, the shadows of what they will be again when they have proper nutriment.

The soul, like the body, will faint if it is famished. Jesus *feeds* his flock like a shepherd. Pastors are appointed to *feed* the church of God, which he hath purchased with his own blood. There is a portion of meat to each *in due season.* It is not enough that there is abundance. Of course, you could not repeat any of the great texts: "God so loved the world," or "This is a faithful saying," or, "Whosoever will, let him come"—without setting forth abundance for all the world and for evermore. There *is*, blessed be God, salvation to the uttermost, love which passeth knowledge, unsearchable riches of Christ, all the fulness of God. And sometimes one of these texts *does* expressly meet the need of a human soul. When the sense of need is newly awakened, when the feeling is that the need is practically infinite, when the fear arises that it may be unrelievable, one of these grand and simple texts will meet the vast emergency, will save a soul from death, and cover the multitude of its sins. But all kinds of spiri-

tual hunger and thirst cannot be appeased simply by the repetition of even the grandest texts. For the appeasing of common hunger you do not want to look at yellow corn-fields and overflowing granaries; you want bread on the table. So, for the satisfaction of the spiritual appetite, you do not want to be perpetually reminded of the infinite abundance, but you want *from* that abundance just what will supply the lack, just your own portion of meat in due season. Ah! but who is that faithful and *wise* servant, who can always give meat in God's house in due season? Souls are always faint with famine through our *unskilfulness*, as much as through our unfaithfulness. We are always putting milk to the strong, and meat to the babes in Christ. We are trying to press men with all the force we can along one way, while God is leading them by quite another. We are trying to feed them with this truth, when they have had surfeit of it, or when perhaps it never did agree with their spiritual constitution to have it administered to them in our way; and now, their souls are fainting for quite another truth of God, which we in our blindness are keeping from them for safety. Nor can any man feed himself wisely always. We are all liable to prefer what is pleasant to what is profitable; what is fair to what is really good. There are some who would be "comforted of God" all day long, "as one whom his mother comforteth." There are some who would work, if it might

be, for all they receive, and who would never come, if they were not called, for wages of grace.—And so we have faintness through spiritual hunger, men not knowing their own need, stewards of God's manifold grace not knowing how to accomplish the dispensation of it. Yet blessed are they that do hunger and thirst after righteousness, for they *shall* be filled, in some way, at some time. If not by one hand, then by another. If not now, some time not long hence. If not by any present providences, by some which will soon be born. If not by life, then to overflowing and for evermore by death.

V.

To name but one more cause of this faintness—*It may come to the body by sickness, by disease.* If there is, for instance, in any case a continual violation of the laws of health, however little the transgression may be, it will bring on feebleness and perhaps generate disease in the end. If there be an overtasking of the physical energies, or an exposure to malign influences, weakness will certainly creep in. If a man works in an unwholesome place, if he breathes in tainted, poisoned air, the whole head will soon be sick, the whole heart faint. Some workmen are dying by their work, dying by accurate measurement of years, and in their own full knowledge. Many more are fainting and falling away

more gradually, without themselves knowing the causes of their decline.

It is even so with the soul. It sickens and grows faint when in any way, in any place, it inhales the poison of sin. That sin may be spread impalpably through the moral atmosphere, or it may be taken like draughts of tainted air in particular places, at particular times. It may come through others, or the soul may be its own tempter. It may seem sin, and darken the conscience as it enters; or it may look only like harmless pleasure, or necessary duty, on coming in, and *afterwards* bite like a serpent, and sting like an adder. No matter from what sources, in what ways, with what admixtures, the soul has drawn it into itself—*It is deadly poison.* It saps the strength, withers the soul's tenderest, freshest life, and draws on in swift or slow degrees a feebleness which, if not checked and removed, would end in death. But there is balm in Gilead, there is a Physician there. This sickness need not be, will not be unto death, if instant measures are taken for purification and remedy.

Now, perhaps I have dwelt too long on the illustration of those different causes and occasions of fainting in the Christian life. And yet it ought to be of some considerable use to us to make any discovery of the real source and beginning of our weakness. When any thing goes wrong with a machine that has many springs

and wheels, sharp eyes peer into its complications, and watch all its movements, until the real mischief is discovered; then there is a sigh of relief, and the thankful exclamation, "Now we know!"

Are you faint? Then what is the cause? Have we discovered it? Is it any of the things that have been named?

Is it perchance the length of the way you have come? That need not distress you. Rather you may be thankful that that *is* the reason of your faintness, *if you are still pursuing.*

Is it the earnest rapidity of your movements? That need not distress you. A little rest and nourishment will recruit your strength, and God, who is faithful, will enable you to do all you desire, and even more than you can ask or think, *if you are still pursuing.*

Is it the roughness of the way? That need not distress you, if you remember who has appointed it, who has walked in it, and what is at the end of it; if you observe also what disasters sometimes happen to those who go by smoother roads. Thank God that faintness has come to you thus, and thank him not less that the thorns and the rocks and the tempests are not yet removed from your way. Thank him for all *if you are still pursuing.*

Or is it a famine of the soul that makes you faint? Is it that you hunger and thirst after righteousness, and

yet are not filled? That need not distress you, if you still hunger and thirst, if you ask until you receive, if you seek until you find, if you knock until the door is opened, if, in one word, *you are still pursuing.*

Or is it sin? Some subtle or some secret sin, some wicked way within you that has not yet been searched and found, or without you that has not yet been avoided and forsaken? That may well distress you, and lead you to summon all your remaining strength to cast it away, or to pull yourself away from it. But even that, while it condemns, humbles, arouses you, ought not to be allowed to discourage you *if you are still pursuing.*

"Pursuing!" Ah, that is the grand word of this text. There is no other word in the language that you could put in the place of *that* word, and leave the text as good as you find it. Let us see. "Faint, yet *presuming.*" What a sign of coming perdition that would be! You remember how Ignorance, in Bunyan's allegory, is represented as coming up to the very gate of the city and knocking boldly for admission, and how on being asked for his certificate, "he fumbled in his bosom for one and found none." "Faint and *desponding!*" That would be nearly as sad, although in quite another way. "The fearful and unbelieving" have at last a dark companionship, and "their part" in a terrible destiny. "Faint, yet *preserved* and protected!" *That* you might think would be better. No; not so good as this. To pursue

in weakness, is nobler than to be preserved in weakness. It is a better criterion of goodness, and a surer sign of the soul's health. To pursue in weakness is even better, in some senses, than to pursue in strength. Who wonders that the *strong* man rejoices to run his race? Who can *but* wonder and admire when the fainting man will *still* run? That shews an eye as clear as the day, and a heart as true as steel. That shews that the life-purpose has taken full possession of the soul, and that God himself is inspiring it. That proves the existence of a vital and indissoluble union between the soul and Jesus Christ. That shews that he is drawing the soul by the attractions of the cross, and meetening it for the glory of the crown. If any one *could* be left and forsaken who has his eye on the end, and is making what effort he can to reach it, such desertion would cast a shadow on the character of God which nothing could ever melt away. A thousand worlds might sing God's praise, but that one soul left to perish while pursuing, yearning and striving for the light of his face, would be quite enough to make discord in every song, in every place, and for evermore.

Take this one word then as the seal of your discipleship to-day, "*Pursuing.*" You are his if you are pursuing. So, he marks you for his own! This is the sealing of the Spirit! this is the white stone with the "new name written which no man knoweth saving he that receiveth it." A neighbour cannot see the sealing, but

you can see it. *You* know whether you are pursuing; whether the truth, and the love, and the purity of the gospel are still dear to you; whether you long for the image of Christ; whether you are pressing on through storm and change to the calm of his eternal presence. Are you pursuing? I do not ask if you are faint. That is of little consequence. Nor if you have failed and fallen miserably far beneath your own ideal and the Saviour's call. I do not ask if your way is rough, if your spiritual friends are few, if sometimes to your own seeming you are far from home; nor, on the other hand, do I ask if you are cheerful, confident, buoyant in hope, but I ask if you are pursuing? If you are, be assured that God owns you as a son, a daughter; and that, if you still press on, he will claim at last the property he has sealed, and will lift you with joy into his eternal home. And remember, finally, that this is to be the sign and seal of all the future, as it is of the present. Remember that whatever disappointments may overtake you, whatever sorrows may come, how different soever life may be from all you now wish and expect, that you are *still to pursue;* and then doubt not, wherever God may find you when he comes with his final call, that that call must, and can only be to the realization of all you have pursued in accordance with his will, and endeavoured in dependence on his strength to win. "For *every one* that asketh receiveth, and he that seeketh findeth, and to him that knocketh, the door shall be opened," at last.

Angel Help.

And Jacob went on his way, and the angels of God met him.—GENESIS xxxii. 1.

Are they not all ministering spirits?—HEBREWS i. 14.

THE general progress of this world is much promoted by mutual knowledge and intercourse among its peoples. When the ships of a commercial nation ride at anchor in the rivers and harbours of an island that has always been inhospitable, when the gates of famous cities, which have always been closed against the foreigner, are opened at last, and the ambassador, the merchant, the traveller, the missionary, are allowed to go in, it is felt, and not without reason, that some steps have been taken towards that organized and complete perfection to which this world is slowly tending.

But there is a still larger and higher perfection than the social completeness and harmony of this world. There is a cosmical, a universal harmony, which, as it advances, will probably unite worlds and races as completely as commerce and civilization bind cities and countries together now. Those who believe in a reigning Saviour know that already there is "a gathering

together of all things in him as the head—things on earth and things in heaven," and that there is something coming in the great future far grander than millennial rest for *this* world. There is the harmony of all worlds, the reconciliation of all things to each other and to God. There are ninety and nine worlds preparing to rejoice over the full recovery of the one that went astray. Now this higher progress, like the lower, is promoted at least in part by mutual knowledge and intercourse, by the meeting of race with race, by the speaking of one world to another. But already, in saying even this much, we have gone beyond the real faith of multitudes. The text goes a long way beyond the actual faith of many who think they receive it as true. Even Christians do not know how slow of heart they are to believe what Christ has said. "Spiritual beings no doubt exist, but not around us here. They are far away in their own worlds, above us and beneath. They are never found in our houses, nor in any of the ways of our pilgrimage, nor in the places where we work. We *might* meet the angels perhaps in a mood of ecstasy, or in some supersensual vision of the soul. We *might* meet the devil and his myrmidons by plunging into the depths of immorality and crime; but neither angel nor devil will be likely to haunt our common ways, or to breathe heaven or hell into our daily life!" Then, farther, when we do at times realize more vividly the existence of such

beings, we are always I think more ready to recognise the evil spirits as hindering us, than we are to observe the good as helping us. Indeed a man's experience is often such that he has, or feels as though he had, more occasion to say, "The devil seduced me to that," than to say "The angels have been helping me to this." But the angels help us to far more than we know. Could you conceive ships hovering benevolently around mistrustful islands, sending in to the inhabitants unknown supplies, keeping pirates and enemies away from the shores—such are the angels to the heirs of salvation. Their ministry for our aid is watchful, constant, sincere. It is a ministry of much care and love; and not the less helpful that it is so quiet and so unseen. We must speak of that ministry to-day, and, I hope, think of it a little more on some days that are coming.

A few words may be necessary concerning the spirits themselves before we speak of their ministry. Our belief in the existence of such beings must rest chiefly, and almost exclusively, on the Word of God. Perhaps an argument might be constructed on natural principles for the probable existence of good and evil spirits. Every other revealed truth has certain *natural* indications and proofs, more or less clear, which are accepted by thoughtful and thankful persons as corroborative of the revelation. Possibly this also may have. A consideration of human beliefs in every age and nation, and

a careful observation of human lives and experiences, might induce, in some uncertain way, the conviction or supposition that man is not so much alone in this world as he seems. But evidently such an argument never could be clear or strong. Happily there is no need to spend our thought in conjecture and speculation. He who has brought life and immortality to light by his gospel, has at the same time revealed an angel world. To a believer in Jesus Christ, the universe is far more than it can ever be to an astronomer without faith. It is a *peopled* universe. Away amid yonder starry heavens, and perhaps far beyond them, *we* know that there are "thrones and principalities, and powers," and "might and dominion," and the naming of high and glorious names. We know that there is a gradation in celestial as in terrestrial life, that there are ranks and races among those bright spirits, and that they are *all* distinguished by the possession of great attributes. Taking the mere hints of the Bible (and compared with the bright reality they are evidently nothing more than hints), we have in them some very grand ideas.

The number of the angels would seem to be very great. Our Lord is "the *Lord of hosts.*" "The chariots of God are twenty thousand, even thousands of angels." "Jacob went on his way, and the angels of God met him." In his dream he saw the whole ladder bright with the moving throng. When the Lord opened the

eyes of the young man who waited on Elisha in answer to the prophet's prayer, "he saw, and behold, the mountain was *full* of horses, and chariots of fire round about Elisha." "Twelve legions" of the angels would have been at the Saviour's side "presently" if he had asked them. "I beheld," says John, in the Apocalypse, "and I heard the voice of *many* angels round about the throne," and the number of them was ten thousand times ten thousand, and thousands of thousands." "Millions of spiritual creatures walk the earth unseen, both when we wake and when we sleep"—that is considered by many people to be but a poet's fancy, and yet read in the light of the Scriptures we have named, it is nothing more than a musical expression of God's fact.

The angels are swift as the flames of fire. "They went every one straight forward. Whither the Spirit was to go they went, and they turned not when they went." "The man Gabriel whom I had seen in the vision at the beginning, *being caused to fly swiftly*, touched me about the time of the evening oblation." "*Suddenly* there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God." The angelic movement, when need is, seems almost as quick as "the glance of the mind, or the swift-winged arrows of light."

They are also strong. With the swiftness of the lightning is combined in them its awful strength.

"Bless the Lord ye his angels that *excel in strength.*" "And they said among themselves, who shall roll us away the stone from the door of the sepulchre? And when they looked they saw that the stone *was rolled away*, for it was very great." "The Lord Jesus shall be revealed from heaven with his *mighty angels*, in flaming fire, taking vengeance on them that know not God." The strength of Samson would be no more to an angel than the touch of an infant would be to Samson.

They seem to be all young. We seem to see them clothed in the perpetual freshness and bloom of immortality. Although they sang together with the morning stars of creation, and shouted for joy long before man was created, decay has not touched them with a finger. They shew no wrinkles of age, feel no weariness in service, carry on their faces the light of perpetual youth.

We must say, in a word, that they are evidently endowed with corresponding *moral excellences.* They are called in more than one place of the Scriptures "*holy* angels." Holiness in them must mean a moral perfection suitable to their nature, just as holiness in us means a moral perfection suitable to ours. "Holy angels" are angels who live and act in perfect accordance with the natural attributes they possess, and with the relations and circumstances in which God has placed them. Their strength never smites goodness, or

supports injustice. Their swiftness never takes them away from God. When we see them they are always engaged about his worship or work—adoring, praising, waiting, serving. "Are they not all *ministering* spirits?"

It is of their actual ministry that I wish now to speak; and, therefore, we need not pause on those parts of Scripture, so full of interest and so very suggestive, which inform us of the general sentiment and feeling they have concerning man and redemption. One apostle informs us that the things of which he is writing, pertaining to the Christian redemption, are things "into which the angels desire to look." They stoop down and peer into these things. This world for the time is their heaven. *So,* they "set their affection on things above." They long vehemently to know as much as may be revealed to them of the marvels and mysteries of God's kingdom on the earth. How a sinner can be pardoned and made pure; how rebels can be changed into loyal subjects; how the wandering children are induced and enabled to return; and how God is glorified by all. These are matters of stupendous interest to them. Indeed, when we think of it, it is a striking and an ominous contrast which is thus furnished between the attitude of the angels and the behaviour of men. They are bending from their heavenly seats, and watching for human salvation, more than they that watch for the morning; while so many of the

human race for whom this salvation is designed can hardly be got seriously to attend to the matter even by the most startling and arrestive means.

There is another passage on which we *might* pause, as holding in it a world of glad interest, that in which our Lord tells us that "there is joy among the angels over one sinner that repenteth." *He* tells us this, who knows so well, who looks on the angels face to face, who knows all their joys and hears all their songs. He tells us (for does it not mean this much at least) that one repenting sinner is to them a kind of epitome of the whole work of salvation, and of the whole ransomed church. In the one trembling convert they see a specimen of the power which will gather together the great multitude from the four winds, and usher them into God's eternal heaven. They might however take this general interest in the progress of the kingdom of grace, and yet not be inclined, or not be able themselves to render any practical assistance to men. But the express teaching of this text is, that they *do* render such assistance, that they "minister to them who shall be," or rather who are "the heirs of salvation." What then *is* this ministration? What forms does it assume? How are its helps really given to the children of men? It is just at this point that there is an entrance of practical scepticism among us to a large degree. We do not *see* how they help; we are not even *told* with any definite-

ness in what ways they minister, and therefore, not denying, we yet fail to believe. No doubt it was easier in some respects to some of the Old Testament saints, and to some of the first Christians, to believe in a practical angelic ministry than it is for us. They *saw* and believed. Lot, hastened by them out of Sodom, *could* not doubt; nor Elijah, surprised under his juniper tree, and strengthened for his journey with the food which the angel had brought; nor Peter, with the light shining around him in the prison, and the broken fetters lying at his feet. Now there are many who transport themselves backwards to the Old Testament ground, and say, "This is where we stand!" Many unbelievers, and it is to be feared not a few Christians, practically say, "Let us *see* the angels in our houses, in our fields, in the temples where we worship, going up and down through our morning and evening skies, and then we shall believe!" It must be granted that this position has a certain look of thoughtfulness, and justice, and free inquiry about it. But when examined more closely, it is really no more than a demand on our part to be put many ages backwards in history, to be treated more as children are treated, to be placed in an economy of signs and wonders, of sense and visibility, instead of standing where we are, in an economy of spiritual truth, and grace, and power. Those who ask for so much in this thing, to be consistent, should ask also, as

indeed some of them do, for inspired men, for workers of miracles, and even for a visible Christ. The answer to such demands would be, that we have the inspiration and the proofs of it preserved in the record; that we have the historic force and the moral power of the miracles working still; that we have the Saviour everywhere present with his people;—*and*, that, in perfect correspondence, we have the full ministry, although all unseen, of the angels of God. Probably this ministry has at least the following characteristics:—

It is a ministry of guardianship. An infant heir is born into the world. For a long time that infant knows no one, can thank no one for love and care. Yet what love and care are around it from the first! The skill of the physician warding off possible disease. The nourishment of the mother keeping it in health. The provident care of the father for education, for wholesome surroundings, for the wellbeing of the far future days. That infant lives, becomes a man, enters into high place and large property; and on the day of possession, opening some old documents, and perhaps reading some old letters, sees that all this guardian care was busy about him as soon as he was born, and that he is debtor to many whom death has already withdrawn from his thanks. So, when we are born to God, when we become "the heirs of salvation," God makes the settlement for our future, and the angels begin their ministry of guardian-

ship. They have "charge" of us for nursing and nourishing, and raising to man's estate. They begin their mystical "encampings round about us," the "bearing of us up in their hands lest we dash our foot against a stone." They begin those watchings, and wardings, and "keepings," which are not ended until we are beyond the reach of every foe, and lifted by grace into their eternal company. When we come into full possession of the inheritance, and stand confessed before all as "heirs of God, and joint heirs with Christ," among other things we shall have to do will be the rendering of joyful thanks to those guardian spirits who had us in kindliest care in the time of our infancy.

It is a ministry of cheerfulness. Angels of light, they must surely cast around them some brightness as they go. They throw some flickerings of glory about our weary steps, and light up the landscapes and pathways of this mortal life as with escapings from the summer sunshine of heaven. There are times when the most urgent need of our life is just to have a little more light, and if in such seasons the angels can give us that, they are friends indeed, and ministers of God to us for good. Sometimes the day darkens, we know not how; things are all in shade; the air is heavy; duty does not wear its nobleness; work is mere hardship without recompense; even friendship loses its solace. We are weary in well-doing, almost weary of living. It seems

as if the freshness and the charm had been plucked from the very heart of life, as if the angels of darkness with outstretched wings were walking over the scene. Then comes a change, we know not how. The day brightens; the sky breaks overhead. We see upward slanting spaces where there would be room for Jacob's ladder. We look at our work, and it stands in nobleness again. Our friends are invested with the halo of tenderness; and even the crosses and the sufferings of life have something on them now of the celestial light. And all this may be just because our guardian angels have come a little nearer to minister unto us of that light of God in which they always dwell.

It is a ministry of animation.—For we are not only cheered and lightened by them—brought into better spirits, as we say in our common speech, but without a doubt refreshed and invigorated by them in the inner man—in the very springs of our spiritual life. Do you doubt whether any creature can come so close to us as this? I think you will find that doubt resolved by simply remembering that if they are sent to give us inward strength, the means of giving it will certainly be furnished to them. Of course their power is "ministerial," not supreme; but that it is real, and oftentimes very helpful to the weak and the weary, admits, I think, of no doubt. They came just after the exhaustion of the Saviour's temptation to "minister" to him—in what, for

such a time, if not in strength? They were seen in the garden "strengthening him" for the last sorrow and conflict. What they did to him, surely they can do to his. And what need there is sometimes! The lack of strength is in certain seasons the deepest need of our life; and the continuance of the weakness for long might easily become a great peril. In such seasons we *see* clearly enough; nor can we discover anything wrong in our feeling, but we cannot do. When we would do the good that we see waiting to be done, the evil in some mysterious way is present with us, and the strength in us is not enough to cast off the evil, and calmly do the good. Then he, from whom all strength comes, sends his angels with soul-nourishment, in the strength of which we do the waiting duty, and perhaps go many days.

It is a ministry of consolation.—Here a difficulty meets us at once. They have no experience of trouble themselves. They cannot "comfort others with the same comfort wherewith they themselves are comforted of God!" I am not so sure of that. I do not know that they have never been permitted to *taste* the cup which their Lord "drank of," and that no drops of his "baptism" have ever fallen on them. I can conceive them asking, like James and John, only in a far higher spirit, and with a nobler aim, that such a baptism might be given them. And none of us can know that if asked it would certainly be denied. When we see the Lord of

glory plunging deeply, and remaining long, in the dark realm of sorrow and pain, we may well pause before we commit ourselves to any strong opinions or assertions regarding the impossibility of the least shadow or relish of his own experience being given, for any object or for any length of time, to his sinless servants who are helping and serving him in the manifold ministrations of his kingdom. But at any rate, there is the fact, confirmed to us by a number of instances, that they do "minister" to the heirs of salvation in *consolation* as in other things. If they do not *know* in any experimental way the mystery of sorrow, then they "desire to look into" it. If in every sense they are strangers to the pangs of suffering, then the tenderness of their benevolence speeds them to the sufferer's side. Hagar is weeping in the wilderness, and an angel guides her to the well. Jacob, in loneliness, and with many sorrowful and bitter recollections pressing more darkly than the night about his heart, falls asleep at last on his hard stone pillow, and they make his oblivion and his dream better to him, than to the king the coronation day. Gideon is threshing his wheat, and thinking of the miseries of his people. The man's face is dark as a winter storm, and as he threshes the wheat more and more fiercely, at last he speaks, and says, "If the Lord be with us, why then is all this befallen us? And where be all his miracles which our fathers told us of; but now the Lord hath

forsaken us." The despairing man has not ceased speaking, when the angel says, "Go, in this thy might, and thou shalt save Israel from the hand of the Midianites." Elijah sees nothing but ruin for the state—the complete triumph of tyranny and idolatry, and lies down in his despondency to die; but he is found and comforted, and sent on to his work. Paul and the ship's company, driven in a helpless vessel, at the mercy of wind and wave, are hovering on the very edge of death; but he sees in one of the night-watches a messenger from that world where night and storm never come, and hears the glad assurance, "Fear not, Paul; thou must be brought before Cæsar, and, lo, God hath given thee all them that sail with thee."

It is a ministry of fellowship and convoy through death to life, and from earth up to heaven. When Lazarus died he was carried by the angels into Abraham's bosom. Such language is of course partly figurative; but surely the mention of the angels is not altogether a figure of speech. Rather, the language seems clearly to point to some offices of mercy assigned to them in regard to the dying, and in regard to the home-coming of death-released souls. Indeed, it could hardly be thought that they would come so far, and minister to us in so many ways in this mortal life, and then draw off from us and leave us quite alone for the home-going. Accordingly, it has always been a Christian

instinct, as well as a scriptural and reasonable belief, that the angels come around dying beds, wait until last farewells are over, and then plume their wings and fly home to heaven with their sacred charge, rejoicing as those who have found great spoil. Sometimes the dying have told how they have seen dawnings of sweet light, and glimpses of bright faces; how they have heard some touches of richest music, and felt some waftings of balmiest air. It has even seemed to some of them that their very names were called; then with new thrillings of the inner sense they have joyfully answered and said, "We are coming; we are coming home!" No one can tell beforehand how death may be lightened to him in this very way. You think of it perhaps as sharp severance from all you love; as loneliness in which the nearest and dearest can give you no company; as a mysterious transit of your spirit through a vast unpeopled void up to the heaven and the home where you would be. And yet, when it comes, it may be the gentlest of all changes. It may be an easy entrance into another company. Ere ever you are aware, the whisper of an angel may tell you (with a meaning and an emphasis how different from those which the expression carries on *this* side the veil!) that "all is over," and that you shall die no more for ever.

This whole subject shews in a very striking manner *the exceeding greatness of the glory of Christ.* If there are

any who feel mayhap a little uneasy in having listened to a whole discourse about angels (and there are those who think that Christ is not preached unless they hear the name sounding like a timbril through the whole of the discourse); if there are any who are afraid that this may be one step towards "the worshipping of angels," the answer to such fears and feelings in the present case is, that this discourse is really all concerning Christ. If you stood and looked at a magnificent procession going to or from the palace of a monarch, you would not feel that your deepest interest centred in the persons who happened to form the procession. You would feel that the great glory rested in the palace, was reflected from the throne, and that if monarch and kingdom were not standing beyond and above in your view, that whole procession would be an unmeaning show. From the number of the retainers, and the splendour of the retinue, we infer the glory of the prince. What then must be the glory of the King whom God hath set on his holy hill, when all these shining throngs are his willing servants—doing his commandments and hearkening to the voice of his words? How vast and bright his kingdom! How grand his royal state! How little does he *need* our service, while so greatly desiring it! How matchless his love and magnanimity in seeking for it, and in thus using the services of his noblest subjects, to regain and recover for himself the love and the loyalty of some of the weakest and the meanest!

We come thus to another reflection, viz.—*The value and greatness of salvation.* That "salvation" to which the angels are always striving to make us fully "heirs." That is *the* thing in which they minister. They attend continually on this very thing. When they gaze most intently, stretching forward to look, the object of their thought and desire is, "salvation." When they fly to the uttermost parts of the earth, or climb the ladder of light until they are beyond every visible star, their work is "salvation." When they cry with loud voice in the praises of heaven, the theme and spirit of the song is still the same—"*Salvation* to God that sitteth on the throne, and unto the Lamb!" Yes; the Lamb! *They* know that salvation is all in him. They see the cross in the centre of the moral universe, and as the only source and power of deliverance to sinners of mankind. They know so well the priceless worth of that deliverance, and they see it standing so *alone*, as a means of life and happiness to those for whom it is designed, that they use all their strength, put out all their swiftness, and they *will* employ all the time between this and the judgment-day in striving to give it good effect. Ah, then, how are we condemned in our remissness—we Christians—if we are thinking little of Christ, doing little for him, and for our own deliverance by his death; if heart is cold, and hand is slack, and hope is feeble, and heaven is far away! What excuse shall we find if

we are not working out *our own* salvation with fear and trembling, when we have *such* ministers of help by our side, for joy and sorrow, for life and death?

And finally, How shall any of us escape if we *neglect* so great salvation? Think *how*. How? How shall we escape? Suppose a man neglecting salvation, and yet "escaping." What would that man be able to say at the last day? He would be able to say to all God's angels: "You have laboured in vain; you have spent your strength for nought and in vain. Your work was not necessary. You never ministered to me, and yet I am escaped." Nay, would not such a man be able to take a still bolder position, and say even to the Lamb in the midst of the throne: "I neglected salvation—that salvation which cost thee tears, and blood, and heart-breaking on the cross—and yet I am escaped." Think whether that is likely to be. Be wise. Understand this. Consider the latter end. Instead of neglecting, receive salvation. Work it out. Be an heir of this great inheritance—an heir of God, a joint heir with Christ. And so you will even now "come to an innumerable company of angels," and their strong and loving ministrations will then be yours until that happy day when you shall see them face to face; and perhaps, who knows? be able in some way to minister to them in the kingdom, and for the higher glory of him who is Lord of all. To him *be* glory on earth and in heaven, for ever. Amen.

Sufficiency of Grace.

My grace is sufficient for thee.—2 CORINTHIANS XII. 9.

THESE are the words of the Lord Jesus Christ to his servant Paul. They are spoken in answer to a prayer. Some great trouble had come to Paul—and not by chance, or in the natural course of things; the trouble had been *sent*, sent as a counterpoise to a great honour. The apostle had been in the third heavens, but when he found himself on earth again, there was a thorn in his flesh. He was the subject apparently of some painful bodily affliction, which possibly was in some way the direct physical result of his elevation into the third heavens. At any rate, the thorn rankled. He longed to be free from it. He prayed the Lord to take it away, as men did pray once, "beseeching him" once, and again, and yet once more—like Christ himself in the garden—and then the answer came, the answer of the text, "I cannot remove the thorn, but I will do more for you than if I did remove it, I will give you strength to suffer. I cannot call off the messenger of Satan, he must buffet you still for your very health and safety; but I will make you victorious in his assaults,

and superior to his wiles—my grace is sufficient for thee."

"And *he said* unto me, My grace is sufficient for thee." The Greek tense here, by a beautiful delicacy of the language, which is not easily expressed in English, signifies, not only that the Lord said that at one particular time, but that he was going on to say it. "He has said! he is saying it now!" The answer was ever sounding in the apostle's ears. The Lord was speaking to him, although not audibly, when he wrote. The Lord was speaking; his soul was listening. That one assurance was vocal for every day of his life, and over every step of his heavenward road, "My grace is sufficient for thee." So that, without any accommodation, and by the very principle of the text, it becomes ours. It becomes ours in proportion as we feel the need of it. The "grace" will come only along the channel of a felt need. That is implied in the whole context. The "strength" will perfect itself, not by finding other strengths within on which to link itself, but "in weakness." Rightly understood, therefore, and used, our weakness is our strength. Our need, when we deeply feel it, is the attracting agent which draws a full salvation in.

But spiritual needs are as various as human characters, and as the scenes of human life. Instead, therefore, of abiding among the generalities of the subject, I propose, with a view to more practical profit, now to

describe *some* of these necessities, shewing, if I can, when and how they arise; and at the same time how they may all be met and fully supplied by the Saviour's all-sufficient grace. The order of our thought will not be formal or systematic. May God make it true and kindly.

Sometimes there is a great conscious need just at the beginning of a Christian career. In very many instances now, the religious life begins quietly and imperceptibly. There are seeds of grace, long sown, which spring up man knoweth not how, "first the blade, then the ear, and then the full corn in the ear." When the blade is first appearing, and scarcely yet green above the soil, in that tender trembling time the need is sometimes felt to be very great. A popular writer has given us a touching chapter "Concerning the Sorrows of Childhood." A still more affecting chapter might be written "On the Sorrows of Conversion," especially when it takes place in youth. And yet it may be doubted whether any among us is wise and gracious enough to write such a chapter well. No stranger can tell, hardly any friend, with how much anxious solicitude, amid how many changing lights and shades, the young heart sometimes makes its way to the first humble hope of some interest in the Saviour's love. There is a well-known hymn beginning—

> "'Tis a point I long to know;
> Oft it causes anxious thought:
> Do I love the Lord or no?
> Am I his or am I not?"

which expresses exactly the condition of many a one beginning the Christian life. I am quite aware that that hymn has been the subject of merciless criticism, that some people of very firm views, and of very bold and confident disposition (disposition so confident as to make them, I think, more the objects of wonder than of envy), have treated it almost with ridicule, as if it described a state in which no one *could* be. But I am afraid the human heart is too subtle and delicate to be caught and squared with any theory; and I think, and thank God, that it is too great to be moulded and mastered as to its states and changes by any system, philosophical or theological. It will just take its own ways and have its own strange feelings with which another cannot intermeddle. Ah, what hoping and fearing there is around us, unknown! What risings and fallings! What gleamings and shadowings! What reachings forth to things which are before, what fallings back again to things behind! Is it thus with any of you? Do you feel like one who has embarked on a great but hopeless enterprise? As though you were in a lone vessel beating up against the gales, but at every tack coming only in view of the same headland? The

Lord said, *is saying* to you, "My grace is sufficient for that transition state, as well as for all that follows." "The Lord knoweth," not only "them that *are* his," but also, and quite as well, those who are *becoming* his. And amid all the quick changes and darkening uncertainties of such a time, he holds in nearness, and offers without any reserve, sufficient grace. While you are struggling with your sins, complaining of your moral disabilities, sorrowing over your heart's unwillingness, and yet rising sometimes with its grand desire, now longing for and now shrinking from the new life-conflict —the Lord is saying to you, "My grace is sufficient for thee."

Take now one step in advance. Think of the transition as made. Only *just*, but really made. We are looking now at a consecrated soul—at one who at last stands out in the light of a personal decision. That decision may be declared to others, or known only in the heart. But it *is* made. Now at last there is some settled trust in Christ. Some constancy of love to him. Some framing and ordering of the whole life to his will by his laws, and some "looking for and hasting unto" his glorious day, and the rewards of his presence. And *then*, just after the fervours of the first love are somewhat abated, and after the sweet freshness has passed from the actings and strivings of the new-born soul—

then comes a coldness and a pause. The young soul, new to the ways of grace, does not understand, is bewildered, discouraged, in danger of falling into a practical unbelief. "Is it so soon thus with me, while I have yet so far to travel, and so much to do, ere I can hope for the final acceptance? All the oil so early spent! My lamp already going out! Are my knees already trembling, and my hands hanging down, while the race is yet nearly all before me, and others seem to be pressing on unwearied to the goal? Ah, what must I do in such a strait as this? Were it not better at once now to give up the endeavour, and return as best I may with the burden of this disappointment into the world again? Better profess nothing than profess and fail. Better aim at nothing than spring up under the impulse of a delusive energy only to fall and be broken." That is the kind of pause that comes to many a young disciple, the kind of feeling that passes through many a heart. And that feeling would not be at all unreasonable on the naturalistic view of human life—in any view of it except the Christian one. Israel in the wilderness, in some of their murmuring moods, reasoned well from their own point of view. Egypt was far better than the wilderness as a place to live in; and if they had been out in that wilderness, like a tribe of wandering Arabs, on some chance journey, vaguely seeking some better land, but without any

promise of it, and without any guidance towards it superior to their own—why, in that case, the murmurers would have been the wise men, and Moses and Aaron the rash and foolish ones. But what is that small white thing like the hoar-frost on the ground every morning? How comes that hard rock to yield the gushing stream? Who is lighting up that pillar of fire for the night? Whence comes that rich glory which shines above the door of the tabernacle? Ah, how do these things change the wilderness state! How do they lift it, with all its wildness and privations, into a divine grandeur, compared with which the splendour of cities and the beauties of gardens and fields are common and poor!

Even so, we say to every young discouraged soul, looking doubtfully to that future which recently was all a future of faith and hopefulness, and almost desiringly to another possible future—one of sense and careless enjoyment; we say, "Yes; you are right. At least you are not so far wrong, if the text were not true. If the Lord has brought you out of Egypt, and *left* you in the wilderness to direct your course towards what land you may fancy, to seek what city you choose, to provide with your own hand for the need of every day that comes, to vanquish in your own strength every enemy that may appear; if the Lord has just come down to convert you, or to lift you up into a state that seemed

like a converted state, and then gone up again to heaven, leaving you to plod earth's weary way *alone*—why, then you may as well go back to Egypt. It is a choice between that and perishing in the wilderness. Perhaps, indeed, it might seem to pure reason (if there were such a thing among men as *acting* from pure reason alone), to be nobler and better to perish in the wilderness, regaling the imagination with the picture of "a better country," although no such country exists, than deliberately to turn the soul to the certainty of a backward journey and a downward life. But I take at present only the broad practical view. You may, if you are standing here alone in life, in regard to its moral purposes and ends alone, without promise, or strength, or helper near—if the Lord who called you is not near now to help you, then you may go back. You may choose any kind of life that seems best—the frivolous life, the feverish life, the money-making life, the life of toil and care, or the life of respectability, or that of social usefulness, or the mad wild life of sin. It does not matter much. You may eat and drink *any* of these things that your soul desireth, for certain it is, that the end of each and all will be alike—to-morrow you die.

But how is the whole case changed, as if December brightened into June, when you listen and hear the text sounding over your *present* life! "The Lord said,"—the Lord *is saying now*—"My grace is sufficient for

thee." He is saying that *now*, with his eye on you and on your life; with a full knowledge of all its circumstances, he is saying that his grace is sufficient. This is the lesson for the day. It is the lesson for every day, but especially of this day to you. The reference is not to a dead grace which *was* sufficient, but to a living grace which *is*. Your gospel is not any past experience not any grand deliverance once for all. It is a present potency which will control all other powers—a present wisdom which will make a path of safety through all perplexities—a present love which will enfold and shelter you even if you stood amid a thousand griefs and fears. And this is the very meaning of the text. It is not a cunning refinement of our own interpretation. It is the sure word of God. It is the Saviour's living message. "As thy day is, so shall thy strength be."

A little farther on we meet with one whose beginning has long gone by. You had a calm and blissful time then. It was a morning without clouds, and seemed as if it would shine more and more unto a perfect day. But now, strange to say, when you ought to be feeling the full powers of spiritual manhood, there has come a chilling and weakening change—in your present mood it may seem almost a desolating change. Like the patriarch Job, you take up your parable and

say, "Oh that I were as in months past, as in the days when God preserved me; when his candle shined upon my head, and when by his light I walked through darkness; as I was in the days of my youth." And this change has come you know not how. Not by any known declensions. Not by any wilful sins. You have not *cast away* your confidence, and yet it is almost gone. You have not extinguished your hope, and yet it is burning low. You never wished to lose sight of heaven, and yet, strain your sight as you will, you cannot now catch a glimpse of its burnished gates. And all this is to you, perhaps, in one way more depressing than if, in looking back, you could see *where* you had swerved. In that case you might come again into the way. You could take with you words, and return to the Lord, and find mercy to pardon and grace to help in this time of need. But as it is, you sometimes see no remedy. It is as if the Lord were drawing off from you; as if he were lifting his presence all out of your life, leaving it dark and cold; as if the harvest were past and the summer ended, and you, after all your toils and hopes, are not likely to be saved. You are omitting no social duty; you are still bowing the knee in prayer; still coming to the house of God with the multitude who keep the holy day; but the sweet meanings are gone. The silent thrillings are felt no more. The surprises of grace visit you no longer. You

feel sometimes as though your soul had lived its best life, and were now sinking into the sleep of death. If you are "planted," you are at least not flourishing. If the rivers of waters still flow by, your roots are drawing little or none of the living stream, and the languishing leaf and the blighted fruit make you think sometimes with trembling of the husbandman's sentence, "Cut it down; why cumbereth it the ground?"

Now there may be *many* ways of recovery, or ways by which recovery may be promoted if not secured; and if by any of them you are lifted out of this darkened and troubled state it will be well.

You might, for example, mistrusting your state as you do, and knowing by your moral intuitions and general consciousness, if not by any exactness of memory, that sin in some form *must* have been acting its malign part in bringing you into a condition so dejected—you might try to search out that sin, secret, subtle as it may be, which has been working at the roots of your life, and you might flash upon it the scorching light of discovery wherever you find it.

Or, conscious, mayhap, that you have been too ready to yield your whole nature to the mood of the moment, whether constitutional or induced, you might come to feel that it was your solemn duty to let your conscience have a little rest while you lift yourself by a purely *intellectual* effort above too much dependence on your

own ever-varying feelings. Laying hold of what truth you still have, as the anchor of a dismantled ship grips the ground in a storm, you might wait for brighter days.

Or, you might, under the conviction that all has gone wrong, seek for a *second conversion*—a thing which many Christian men greatly need.

But a quicker and a better way than all these is the way of the text. The Lord is saying to you also, "My grace is sufficient for thee." Take fast hold of *that* and you are safe. *Keep* fast hold of that, acting in everything like one who believes it true, and ere long the health and joy of other days will come back, the roots of your faith will grip the soil again; and through all the inner channels of your life the nourishing stream will flow; and your "leaf" will grow green; and your fruit will colour and ripen to its "season;" and "the rivers of waters" will go rolling and murmuring by; and whatsoever you do shall prosper.

Hear this word of the Lord, then, all ye who stand pausing and at fault. It is a word for the life of to-day. It is spoken in view of your smitten and withering life. It speaks nothing of vanished feelings and lost grace. It is not the lingering echo of a gospel of bygone time. Nor is it the promise of a gospel that *will* arise upon you on some future day. It is like our Saviour's word to Zaccheus, "*This day* is salvation come." Yesterday is gone. You know not what to-morrow may bring

forth, but *to-day* brings forth this grand assurance, living and fresh as if angels sang it over grassy fields, as if prophets and apostles crowned with flame were writing it in your sight, "My grace is sufficient for thee." And *if* you take it to-day, then I know that to-morrow you will gird your loins and bind on your sandals for the way, and as you walk, new heavens will open above you, and a new earth will bloom around; you will "obtain joy and gladness, and sorrow and sighing shall flee away."

Now we see another, also well on in the course. He stands out strong and dark to our view, as if the shadow of a coming calamity, or at least of an awful fear, lay over his life. He has run well, and is not without hope that he may run again, when that which lets is taken out of the way. Meantime he can hardly stir. There is the pressure of a terrible strait. Within him, and almost shed into the air around, are the tremblings and strugglings of a tempted soul. And this temptation is not what some people call their temptations, but which are in fact only the importunate clamours of the vices they have cherished, or the bold assaults of the sins they have wooed. This is some real and searching temptation which comes to the man simply, and inevitably, in the providence of God. He has been doing his duty and going on his way, and out of that duty done, or some-

where amid the steps of that pathway of daily life, there has sprung up, without his knowledge, and in no way subject to his will, this great temptation.

Or, he has been using and enjoying his privileges, and out of these privileges, highly valued and carefully used, this danger has arisen.

Not long since he sang of the "plain path." He was led out in the morning with joy, and came in at night with peace; and now, by the lapse of a day perhaps, by the turning of a corner, the reading of a letter, the coming of a friend, all is trouble, and uncertainty, and fear. He would flee, but he cannot. He *must* stand. He must go through or fall, unless God shall make a way of escape. And you see him now standing, with every sense awake, with the tremor of a spiritual fear in every nerve, and you hear him ask, "What shall I do? How shall safety and deliverance come to me here?" How? They will come out of the text. This text carries nothing if not safety for *such* a time, for *such* a trial, to all who will look for it and take it. "My grace is sufficient for thee." It would be strange indeed if it were not. In that case God's providence would be stronger than his grace. His providence would be forming moral situations, and developing moral needs, beyond the power of his grace to supply. He would be leading men into states and perils from which he would know there could be no deliverance. With unusual energy

the Scriptures repudiate such a conclusion—"Let no man say when he is tempted, I am tempted of God!" The thing is utterly impossible. "God cannot *be tempted* with evil, neither *tempteth* he any man." There is an equal firmness in another passage—"There hath no temptation taken you but such as is common to man"—such as is accommodated to human strength and circumstances. "God is faithful. He *will not* suffer you to be tempted above that ye are able; but will with the temptation also make a way to escape, that ye may be able to bear it." When a temptation comes purely in God's providence, it will very often be found that "*with* the temptation" comes the way of escape. The pressure of the temptation will be towards the door of escape. Or if the way of escape is not disclosed with the temptation, it *will* be as soon as it is needed. Some gentle door will open where it was thought no door could be. Some new events will arise. Other persons will appear upon the scene. There will be some unexpected turnings in the providence of the time. God is continually saving his people from temptation and its perils by what seem to be the simplest and gentlest means. He is delivering us all day long. He is making ways of escape from dangers which we do not see until we have passed them. In tales and romances you sometimes have a man brought almost within reaching distance of his mortal enemy without any suspicion that he is there. The thin

partition of a room, a slender garden wall, or perhaps only a shadowing tree or bush come between. That is often the *real* state of things as between a man and his spiritual enemies. We shall never know our dangers and deliverances fully until we surmount them all and look down on them from heaven. Meantime we know that God is faithful—that, therefore, he will not suffer you to be tempted above that ye are able. He will weigh each temptation that comes to you in the balance to see that it is not too much. He will have the possible ways of escape all open, the doors of deliverance unlocked, and moving easily on their hinges that ye may glide out of one or another almost unseen. True, after God has weighed the temptation you may add something to it with your own hand. *Then* it will be too heavy. True, you may stand looking at the door instead of passing quickly through. God will not drag you away; and if you stay against your own sense of duty, and against the clear intimations of his providence, like a silly bird you may be snared and taken in the net of the great fowler. But God is faithful. His word is true. He is justified in his sayings. He is clear when he is judged. Call upon him and he will deliver thee. He will deliver thee from the snare of the fowler, and from the noisome pestilence. His grace is sufficient for thee; and his strength will be made perfect in weakness."

Let us make just one more application of this text, and see how the softening shadow of it will come over *the soul that is in trouble.*

But *what* picture shall we take from among the children and the scenes of sorrow? In a suffering world like this, where the sufferers are so many and the sorrows are so various, it may seem almost a species of favouritism to select one, or even one of a class, for special human sympathy, or as the object of any peculiar grace of God.

Shall we take the man with the sunny face, the voluble tongue, the ready, helpful hand, who yet at times has a sorrow like death weighing on his heart? Or shall we take the physical sufferer, who in sheer pain, that has continued for long, and is not likely to depart until the spirit does, will have suffered a thousand deaths, as to pain, before death comes? I remember travelling once in a railway carriage opposite to a gentleman who, at the first glance, seemed well, but who, to a deeper view, shewed suffering on every feature of his face; and sometimes as the carriage rounded the curves of the line and became unsteady, a low groan of anguish would escape involuntarily from his lips. Yet the man was going about his business. It is some years since I saw him, but he may be living and suffering still. If so, I hope he knows and draws from the grace of Christ, which is sufficient for him. Or shall

we take the widow in her weeds of woe, with a heart in tears all day long, hardly ceasing from its grieving even in sleep? Or the children at their evening prayer, saddened, and thrown into a child's perplexity, by the thought of *two* fathers in heaven? Or the widow who never wore the weeds of woe, but who has gone through the bitterness of death as the victim of an unfaithful love? Or the bankrupt who retains his integrity, but endures a thousand slights and disadvantages because he has lost his money and his place? Or shall we take any of those sensitive, shrinking souls, which seem to have *been made* for suffering—who, at any rate, have a special faculty of *making* or extracting it from the whole of this human life? Or shall we enter, with silent footstep and hushed breath, one of those rooms (and there are a thousand such around us in this great city, which shews us nothing but its splendours, and lets us hear nothing but the roar of its life), where suffering is deepening and dropping into the arms of death?

We had better *not* select. Let every sufferer, whether by the body, or by the mind, or by the circumstances, hear for himself, and guage all his trouble while he hears; then let him apply the sure word of promise to its lengths and breadths, and depths and heights; then let him carry it home to the aged, the sick, the feeble, and to all whom it may concern, as the word of

a God who cannot lie, as the assurance of a Saviour who cannot but pity and help, as the title to a legacy of which they are all made heirs if they will only claim and inherit, as a shelter for every path, an assuagement for every sorrow, a canopy for every sufferer's bed, a sweet soul-secret for life and for death to every trusting soul, however troubled—"My grace is sufficient for thee."

"For thee." If you lose the personal application, you lose all. It is for *thee*. I would that you would now enter into your closet—you may do so even here in an act of faith—and that you would shut to the door, enclosing only the text and "*thee*." This text is not for a world, but for a man. There are some texts which are first for a world and then for a man. This is first for a man and then for a world. "Sufficient for thee." For thee, young pilgrim, in the first pauses of thy celestial way! For thee, strong runner, wearied now, and fainting on the midway plain! For thee, tempted spirit, struggling in the network of circumstance, and watching for the saving providence and the delivering hour! For thee, sufferer in any way, by pain, or loss, or change, or death! And for thee, whom our voice cannot reach—may God the revealer of secrets tell it to thee, thou dying one, already half away, and may thy soul, composed in its deep consolations, and borne

up by its immortal strength, have safe passage thus, as in the very arms of the grace, into His presence whose grace it is!

"For thee." I say again *for thee.* Whoever thou art, "for thee." It is for thee now to change the pronoun and say, with a wondering grateful heart—"For *me.* To-day, and every day, from this time forth, and even for evermore, for me: his grace is sufficient for me." AMEN.

A Multitude of Thoughts.

In the multitude of my thoughts within me, thy comforts delight my soul.—PSALM xciv. 19.

THE greatness of man appears in this, that he can say "*my thoughts.*" The inferior creatures have, properly speaking, no thoughts. They have passions, and instincts, and laws of their nature guiding them, but nothing which rises to the dignity of thinking. Man is the Lord of this lower world because *he thinks.* There are other signs of the sovereignty—the erect form, the heaven-looking face, the flexible organs; but the chief sign of power is that which is not visible. It is *the thinking.* A man can indeed enter into still higher states than states of thought. He can do something better than think. He can love and pray. A state of moral feeling is higher than a state of pure thought. A state of worship is higher than a state of moral feeling. But the moral feeling is full of thoughtfulness, and so is the worship. So that if in this way we look at its consequences and fruits, the power of thinking is the grand characteristic of a man! He is only a little

lower than the angels. Like them he can send thoughts up to God over all. He can think of truth, and duty, and immortality. He can recal the past, shut out the present, anticipate the future.

What a grand power is this power of thought! What a grand being is man when he uses it aright! Because after all it is the *use* made of it that is the important thing. Character comes out of thought. Or rather, thought comes out of character. The particular thoughts are like the blossoms on the tree; they tell of what kind it is. "As a man thinketh in his heart so is he."

We all know that it is the teaching of the Scriptures that a man's thoughts by nature are not right, not good. "The imagination of the thought of his heart is evil, and that continually." "The Lord knoweth the thoughts of man that they are vanity." He counsels the wicked to "forsake his *thoughts*." "Out of the heart," says our Saviour, "proceed *evil thoughts*." "His word is a discerner of *the thoughts* and intents of the heart."

And when the heart is changed they are changed. By a mighty yet silent process the whole character of a man's thoughts is changed when he receives the spirit of God. A converted man can say, "I am now thinking differently. The fountain is purified, and the streams are growing clearer." The thoughts of a good man are harmonious, being linked together in the chain of truth.

They are calm and peaceful, for the "reconciliation" is accomplished. They are full of hope, and trust, and love.

His own *proper* thoughts are so—the thoughts of his new life. But he cannot entirely throw off his former self. He is still liable to distraction and disturbance; still very open to sudden inroads of care and trouble.

A good man's soul has found the secret of happiness and the centre of rest. But to keep that secret as fresh and new-found, to abide on or near the centre of rest;—these things are not so easy. Besides, the world has not found the centre of rest. He is *in* the world, and by any change of its circumstances, by any darkening or lightening of its surrounding scenes, he may be exposed to the inroad of its "troops" of cares, to the roll of its billows and waves of anxiety and trouble. No man on this side heaven, can tell that he may not suddenly be brought, either by his own heart—its deceitfulness or its feebleness—or by outward things, into such a condition of mind as will be well expressed by this text—"In the multitude of my thoughts within me thy comforts delight my soul." And to have such a text as this for use and comfort when you need it—how rich the privilege!

We do not know exactly *what* the care and anxieties of the Psalmist were in that old time. Very probably they were not so unlike our own as we are apt to

imagine—different in form, no doubt, but the same in substance. Well, and "the comforts" are the same in substance too. "He hath given us *everlasting* consolation and good hope through grace." The consolations of three thousand years ago are fresh and full to-day! God's comforts are not like melting vapours and summer brooks. They are "rivers of pleasures," and "wells of salvation." We stoop down to drink where Abraham bent the knee. We draw water where David assuaged his thirst. Jesus talks to us of the living water which shall be "*in us* a well of water." If the toils, and cares, and troubles, which exercised the pious soul of the writer of this psalm should come in on us in all their multitude, and with all their tumult, like the noise of many waters; the "comforts" of our God, fuller, deeper, and more abiding, will come flowing in to still them, and to fill all the soul with their own sweet delights.

Let us then meditate on this truth a little longer: This—*That God's comforts are always greater than our troubles;* and that in proportion as we allow them to come in to us we shall have peace and joy.

I.

Suppose, then, first, that the trouble arises directly out of the heart. The multitude of the thoughts in this case are all tinged with self-accusation. Sin revives, the better self seems dead. The heart that was purified and

clear seems all dark again—turned into a fountain of bitter waters. When you would do good, evil is present with you. You can will, but you cannot perform. Or, in complete moral impotence, you seem not to be able even to will. And, if you call upon God at all in such a time, it must be in the old cry which yet *never* grows old, for the earth is always full of sinful struggling men: "Oh, wretched man that I am, who shall deliver me?" Where is the comfort for such a state? Where? In the whole Gospel. In all the fulness of Jesus Christ. In his cleansing blood, in his purifying spirit, in his tender love, in his power "to save to the uttermost all who come unto God by him."

This tumult of a sinful heart is no strange thing to him. Perhaps you fancied that you had gone a little beyond the need of an "uttermost" salvation. Perhaps you put certain experiences connected with pardon and peace, and free acceptance, in the list of first principles that were to be "left," while you went on to perfection; and now he has sent this tumult—this "multitude of your thoughts within you," to teach you, that those are indeed first principles of a good life in this world, but that they are *not* to be left, but taken with you for use in all the progress. He is bowing your spirit down once more at his cross! He is teaching you to *live* by faith in his sacrifice. He is saying, "Not by works, lest any man should boast." He is magnifying in your

eyes the exceeding grace of God, his unwearying patience, his all-reconciling love. He is preparing you by self-humiliation for a higher joy. He is giving you the text—the last part of it as well as the first, a new fresh gift to your soul to-day: "In the multitude of your thoughts within you let this comfort delight your soul."

II.

Suppose, in the next place, that the trouble arises, not out of the heart directly, but out of the circumstances. God rules and sanctifies some of his children very much by their heart experiences and very little by outward things. And he rules and sanctifies others very much by outward things, and comparatively little by heart experiences. There are some who have not habitually many fears within, but who have often or constantly great fightings without. Martha still lives her busy toilsome life. "Careful and troubled about many things" is written on many a face. These many things will not lie straight. They were straightened yesterday, and they are crooked again to-day. You smooth and press them down, and when you lift your hand they are rough and all awry. This is partly because they are "*many* things." Our exterior life becomes more complex as our civilization advances. "Having food and raiment," we are not "therewith content." We have appearances to maintain as well as children to feed.

We have higher tastes and social necessities to meet as well as bodies to clothe; and we are busy getting "raiment" for them all. If the raiment is not enough, then there is a multitude of thoughts within us. A man's house, trade, credit, standing—these things become a part of himself. He carries them all through the busy days of the week, through the streets of the city, through the hours of the evening entertainment, and (with lightened pressure) through the day of holy rest.

Ah! a man does not know when he begins to rise, and extend himself, and multiply his possessions, how God will use all these things, which he himself desires and seeks only for pleasure and advantage, for more searching discipline and for far higher ends. But in many a case he does. He lets a man go on, and get and gather, and rise and grow, up to a certain point—and then, all at once, he pulls the reins of his providence. He makes restriction, makes difficulty, makes scarceness; and out of these raises up a multitude of troubled thoughts that he means to use as discipline first, and then as inlets to his own "comforts." The comforts God has for such a state are manifold, and they sometimes break upon the man suddenly, like stars through clouds. You might write down a hundred texts, every one of them a comfort of God. "Ebenezer!" That seals and keeps all the past, so that now you *cannot* lose it. It will be a *fact* for evermore, and I trust

to you a blessed memory, that the Lord *has* helped you through all that past. "The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want!" Is not that a plentiful provision for the present hour? Does it not seem to spread ripe harvest fields around you, to fill garners in your sight, to "prepare a table before you," in the presence of enemies or friends? "Jehovah Jireh!" That, like a bow of promise, spans the future, and lights it to the last limits of earthly time. And there are some texts with still more tenderness in them. "Your heavenly Father knoweth that ye have need of these things." That is a comfort. And is not this also—"He *careth* for you?" And this—"My God shall supply all your need?" And this (all comforts in one)—"I will be a God unto you?" In the multitude of your thoughts within you *let* these comforts delight your soul.

III.

Or suppose that the trouble comes not by any worldly need, or the fear of it, but yet that it arises in some way out of the strangeness and the strength of divine providence. Divine providence is often a strange thing, and always a strong. No man can rule it, although many a man makes the endeavour. He digs a channel here, and the waters flow there. He builds a barrier, and they sweep it away. He wills, and forgets that the accomplishment must depend on the willing of

others; and that their willing and his alike are subject to the perfect will of God. Now, certainly there is no sin in having and using a will. A man without a plan, without a purpose, without *a will*, is no man. But it often happens that the trouble arising out of these things is very great. At some particular times the whole result to a man, of his much ingenuity, of great self-sacrifice, of patient industry, of steadfast adherence to what seemed right and true, is just the former part of this text, "a multitude of thoughts within him!" A dark enough inheritance it seems; and a strange result of what went before. But the truth is, it is only half the inheritance. The other, the better half, is yet to come. It is distressing enough for a man to see his own plan of life, or some great purpose and design of it, broken and floating like wreck on the waves. To one whose self-will has never been subdued, who has never seen in his life the workings of a higher hand, there can be nothing in the sight but food for dejection and despair. But to him who has been taught to offer the prayer, "*Not as I will, but as thou wilt*," such an occasion may easily be the means of giving him a higher faith than ever he has had before; and then, by means of the higher faith, will flow in the marvellous comforts of God for the delight of his soul. There are two comforts of God especially suited to this state, which hold in them many more.

There are many who need them. *Every* Christian does, more or less. Every man with a will, with a plan, with any great and generous purpose, is sure to be at some time so thwarted as greatly to need the comforts of God. Then take these comforts, these two:—The first is this, that undoubtedly the supreme and perfect will of God has been working in all. And as soon as there is a devout recognition of that will, there will be some beginning of rest, some influx of a holy calm. That truth may seem hard at first, as you gaze on it through the gloom of your personal disappointment, as you see it rising beyond the wreck of your hopes. It will seem at first simply awful and overwhelming. But as you gaze, it will grow softer and more beautiful. Then you will think with acquiescence, "*That* is what comes of all my toil—the accomplishment of God's perfect will. That is *right;* then mine would have been wrong. That is wise; then mine would have had some folly in it. That is loving, for the God who *is* love cannot have a will which is anything else; then it is better for me than my own. In the multitude of my thoughts within me, this comfort shall delight my soul." But there is another. Because another is needed to make the comfort full. For the man might still say, "Then all *I* have been working for is pure loss—loss of energy, loss of affection, loss of time—mere ruin in God's universe. God does

not need ruins to build with. How much better, therefore, it would have been if I could have discovered the perfect will earlier, so as to save all that bootless toil and useless waste." Not so. For here is the second comfort:—"All things work together for good to them that love God." *All* things. He needed these things to build with. They are ruins to you; they are precious stones to him. They are your mistakes; they are his developments. They are your darknesses, shadows of his coming lights. And he has kept all that you have done, and tried but failed to do, so completely in his own management and care as to their effects, that he is able now to say, "All *these* things, as well as all other things, will work together for your good if you love me —if you love me for what I will, for what I work, for what I am." In the multitude of your thoughts within you, let *this* comfort also delight your soul.

IV.

We hardly need give another illustration. If another is needed, we may find it in the state of the church universal. A devout Christian looking at the whole church may well have a "multitude of thoughts within him." This whole church is the one body of Christ, and "every one members one of another;" and yet what divisions, what conflicts there are among the parts and sections! What a magnifying of little points of difference! What

a blindness to the grand points of agreement! What great uncharitableness of one section to another! How fiery the heats of controversy! How sharp the tongues of the messengers of salvation when they speak to the world of each other!

Now of course there is a right and a wrong in all these matters more or less, and it is right for men to speak out their individual convictions, and to reason and examine until the truth is found and established, in so far as it is a unity and not a harmony. But in charity, not in maliciousness; in love, not in anger; with calmness, not in the fire of passion; as brethren, not as enemies: and a man, we say, surveying the whole body, observing its divisions, and watching its conflicts, may well have his mind filled with "a multitude of thoughts," with strange doubts and questionings. "Is this really the *one* body of Christ? Are these all brethren? Are they all redeemed with the same blood? all sanctified and filled with the same spirit? all members of the same family? all converging to the same eternal home? Then why is it thus with them? When will the 133d Psalm be the song of all the churches? and mutual love be again the badge of discipleship? and the union of the church in action be the sign of the earth's renewal?

Here also God's comforts come in to delight the soul. The Lord reigneth. He overrules *all* mortal

things. He will heal the distractions of his church. He will give "the same mind and the same judgment." He will give one heart and one soul. He will pour out his spirit as a spirit of love and power and of a sound mind. He will restore the waste places, the ruins of many generations. He will bring again Zion. He will establish and make Jerusalem a praise in all the earth.

What a flowing together there will be of hearts, and churches, and nations, when God appears in his glory to build up Zion! As you think of the church's torn and distracted state now, think also of that coming day; and in the multitude of your thoughts within you this comfort will delight your soul.

This will be illustration sufficient of the fundamental truth we are trying to set forth, that God's comforts are always greater than our troubles.

The text seems also to indicate that they are always very near, and always available. "In the multitude of my thoughts thy comforts arise." The two things seem to exist *together* in the soul; they often do in our actual life and experience. You can say, "I am troubled, and yet I am comforted." There are those who can still take up that strange but grand confession of the apostle Paul—more passionate and noble, both in language and sentiment, than anything that Shakespeare ever wrote—"We are troubled on every side, but not distressed; perplexed, but not in despair; persecuted, but not for-

saken; cast down, but not destroyed." We carry the dying, we manifest the life, of Jesus. We have great supports. We are on the gaining side. Light ariseth in the darkness. If it has not yet arisen it soon will. The comfort is near, very near. Among the multitude of thoughts it will glide like a soft stream, or gently shine like a calm day that smiles away the storm. Near! just at hand. Near as the well to Hagar, which her blinding tears and suffocating sorrows hindered her from seeing. Near as the shore to the storm-tossed disciples, when, amid the darkness and the spray, taking *Jesus* on board, *immediately* they were at the land.

Hidings.

I hid myself.—GENESIS iii. 10.
I flee unto *thee* to hide me.—PSALM cxliii. 9.

WE never can know the character of an action truly by its outward appearance alone. The act of selfishness may be the same in seeming as the act of benevolence that stands by its side. The selfish man, for his own selfish purposes, comes among the charitable with *his* gift, and none but God sees *greed* at the heart of the gift, and writes "abomination" upon it.

Satan presented himself among the sons of God, and perhaps some of the sons of God did not know he was there. There was no outward difference between them and him. A young man goes hurrying along a certain road on a Sabbath morning, to meet some companions with whom he has pledged himself to spend the day in amusement and frivolity. In a little while that young man is seen again—at the same hour of the Sabbath morning—hurrying along the same road, but with a heart how changed! with purposes how different! He is going to meet companions in some religious labour. He is going to spend the day in the vineyard, and

among the people of God. So different in character may be two actions which are identical in form.

So here, in those two texts, we have what is outwardly the same action—the action of hiding. Adam is hiding. David is hiding. And yet between the act of the one man and that of the other there is all the difference which must ever exist between things which are morally wide as the poles asunder. The one is hiding *himself;* the other is hiding *in God.* Adam hides in fear. David hides in confidence. The one text shows us *the sinner's flight;* the other *the saint's refuge.* Let us consider both.

I.

Let us contemplate the sinner "hiding himself." For is not this flight and concealment of Adam among the trees of the garden like a symbolical representation of what sinners have been doing ever since?—have they not all been endeavouring to escape from God, and to lead a separated and independent life? They have been fleeing from divine presence, and hiding themselves amid *any* trees that would keep that presence far enough away.

(*a.*) One of the most common retreats of the sinner is that of complete thoughtlessness. What countless thousands of human beings have fled to this retreat; and how easily and naturally does a man take part and

place with "*all the nations that forget God!*" We have said *complete* thoughtlessness; but it is not complete. If it were, there would be no *conscious* hiding—no more flight: the forest would then be so deep and dense that no divine voice would be heard at all, and no divine visitation of any kind felt or feared. But it is not so. Now and again a gleam of light *will* come piercing through. Now and again a voice from the unseen presence will summon the fugitive back. During some hour of the Sabbath day, in the quiet evening, on the sick-bed, beside the dying friend, or while looking into the open grave, the startled soul hears the question, "*Where art thou?*" and for the moment turns and trembles to the speaker, but then turns again away and flees as before, trying afterwards to forget even such gracious interruptions as these, and to plunge so deeply into thoughtlessness, that they shall not be likely to occur again. Is it not so? Might I not ask some of you how long it is since you seriously thought of God? Have not you to travel back over a good many days, weeks perhaps—it may be months—to come to the time? It was when your mother died, or your sister, or when God took your little darling from your arms to his. It was that night when you opened the New Testament and read some of the words of Christ, and felt as if Christ himself were really standing by your side and speaking them to *you*. But the book was

closed, and then the heart was closed, and then the day was closed, and then you closed your eyes, and you have been among the trees of the garden ever since. You have never heard the Saviour's voice again. Yes; during all that time you have been fleeing—over the space of all those days you have been going—to escape from divine presence, to be out of hearing of the divine voice—deeper, deeper, deeper still into thoughtlessness, farther and still farther away from God. You have been meeting the light of each new morning with gladness, but never looking up to *his* face who causes all its shining—lying down each night in dreamless rest, but never thinking, "*So he* giveth his beloved sleep!"—grasping the hand of friendship, returning the neighbourly salutation, hastening to fulfil the appointments of business, but always and everywhere fleeing from God—hiding yourself, or rather trying to do so, in the deep thicket of forgetfulness and thoughtlessness. Hiding! No; it cannot be. You might as well try to hide the landscape from the meridian sun, or the shore from the sea which is always embracing it, as expect to *be* hidden from God. Hidden from him who formed the eye! who planted the ear! who claims the day as his! who also owns the night—to whom the darkness and the light are both alike! Hidden from him who besets us behind and before, whose presence is in every place, "whose eyes are as a flame of fire;" who *for him-*

self acknowledges no distance, notes no passing time; who embraces the universe in the scope of his presence, and eternity in his continual thought! No; it cannot be. But how sadly wrong must matters be within when such an endeavour should be made. And how very wrong it is to make it. How truly are we children of Adam, inheriting his fallen nature, and sharers of his guilty fear. Would not a man's deepest experience, if he would speak it out, find expression sometimes in Adam's language, "I heard thy voice in the garden, and I was afraid, because I was naked, and I hid myself."

(*b.*) *The occupations of life* furnish another retreat for man when fleeing from God. Man *works* that he may be hidden. He works hard that he may hide himself deep. The city is a great forest in which are innumerable fugitives from God, and sometimes the busiest are fleeing the fastest, the most conspicuous to us may be the farthest away from *him*. What a mass of secularities will a man pile up sometimes between his soul and God! and how affecting is it to follow him even for one day in his flight! He flees from his chamber in the morning that the spirit of seriousness may not settle in his heart. He flees from his house without having felt its highest charm, without having thought of the fatherhood of God and of the home on high. Along the busy street, seen by every passer by, he is yet still in flight; and as soon as he begins the business of the day he is

like one plunging into a forest, and we see him no more. And all the day he is fleeing—on and on—through the cares and calculations, through the profits and losses, through the intercourse and the correspondence, and all the management and all the toil of the day—he is fleeing.

There is not one thing perhaps which he does during all the day that, in itself, is wrong—which might not indeed be nobly and spiritually right. Work is right—the allotment of God, the best discipline for man. Trade is right—the dispenser of comforts and conveniences, the instrument of progress and civilization; and from these things actual benefits unnumbered do unceasingly flow; and yet there can be little doubt that the case is as we say. These right things are used at least for *this* wrong end—as a screen, a subterfuge, a deep retreat from the voice and the presence of the Lord. If not *so* occupied, the busy thought of the mind might turn in upon itself, or the attention might be irresistibly called to higher things; "the voice of the Lord" might be "heard in the cool of the day;" and to prevent this, with many the day is filled to pressure with secular heat and hurry, with worldly toil, and task, and claim, until all "coolness" is driven out of it, and its last hour of all has fatigue, and exhaustion, and collapse, but no quietness or devotion, no felt nearness of God.

(*c.*) *The moralities of life* form another retreat for

souls hiding from God. Some men are deeply hidden there; and it is hard to find them; harder still to dislodge them. This does not appear to be an *ignominious* retreat; a man seems to retire (if indeed he may be said to retire at all) with honour. Speak to him of spiritual deficiency, he will answer with unfeigned wonder—"*In what?*" and if you say again—"*In the keeping of the commandments,*" he will give you the answer that has been given thousands and thousands of times since the young man gave it to Jesus—"All these things have I kept from my youth up. Not perfectly, not as an angel keeps them, but as well as they are usually kept among men; and what lack I yet?" So fair is the house in which the man takes shelter. *So* green is the leafage of the trees amid which he hides. He does not profess to be even "afraid" as Adam was. He hears the voice and does not tremble. He hears the call, "*where art thou?*" and answers, "I am here, dwelling in this house of merit which I have built; I am here, walking in this garden of virtues which I have planted and trained; I am here, under the shadow of the commandments I have kept." This man seems really to deal somewhat with the merits of the case. He regards his life in a serious spirit. He acknowledges the supremacy of law. He does not live for sensual ends, he does not forget God. Why, then, should it be said that *he* is hiding? Because in deep truth he is. He is attending to rules,

but not adopting soul principles of life. He is yielding an outward and mechanical compliance to laws, but he has not *the spirit* of them in his heart. He endeavours, but he does not *hunger* and *thirst*, after righteousness. He is not without morality, not without many amiable and excellent qualities, but he *is* without God in the world.—The living and the true God, the holy and the just God, the pardoning and restoring God, the loving and the gracious God, he does not know; and there is *some* consciousness of this now and then within. Sometimes the gleam of the forked lightning is seen among the branches; sometimes the roll of the distant thunder is heard; and the cool of the day is solemn, and the sound of the awful voice comes quivering through the stillness and leaves tremor in the heart; and *then* for a brief moment the man feels "*I am* in flight, I am in fear." Ah! would that in *such* moments he would resolve to think the matter out; and then he would see that, dressed in these moralities alone, he is no better in the eye of the heart-searching God, than a beggar wrapped in a courtly robe standing in a king's presence.

(*d.*) *The forms and observances of religion* constitute sometimes a hiding-place for souls. Men come to God's house to hide from him. They put on "the form of godliness, but deny its power." They have a name to live, but continue dead. They seem to draw near, but in reality "are yet a great way off." They figure to them-

selves an *imaginary* God who will be propitiated and pleased by an outward and mechanical service—by the exterior decenies of the Christian life—when all the while they are escaping from the *true* God, whose continual demand is "My son, give *me thine heart.*" Is it not so? If God were to come forth upon a certain man and say, calling him by name, "*Where art thou?*" he would answer, if he answered truly, "I am here, hidden in grand formalities. I am here, among the trees of the garden which thou hast planted, embowered and shadowed every week in the ceremonies of a religious life. I am here, listening to a godly minister, observing Sabbath worship in company with the multitude who keep the holy day. I am here, reading the Bible; here, on my knees in prayer;—and I am doing all these things that I may, if possible, be at rest—*away* from thee; that I may still a troubled conscience; that I may allay the cravings of an unsatisfied heart; that I may "hide myself," and "be at peace." Ah, the deceitfulness of the human heart! that men should come to God to flee from him! That they should mingle with the children in order that the Father may not see them; that they should walk up and down the great estate that the Lord of the manor may not think of them, nor call them into his presence!

Yet so it is, and therefore, Let a man examine himself, whether he be in the faith, or merely in the form;

whether he have a good hope through grace, or a hope that will make him ashamed; whether he be in the very presence, reconciled, trustful, and loving, or yet estranged, deceiving himself, and fleeing *from* the only true shelter. For we may depend upon it that in all these ways men do fly from God. They hide themselves in deep thoughtlessness, in busy occupation, in faultless morality, in religious service. And God seeks them, for he knows they are lost. He pursues them, not in wrath but in mercy; not to drive them away into distance, condemnation, despair; but to bring them out from every false refuge and home to himself, the everlasting and unchanging shelter of all the good.

II.

And many do turn and flee to him to hide them. Adam is the type of the flying sinner. David is the type of the fleeing saint.

Here we have the very heart and soul of conversion, "*I flee unto thee.*" The man who says this has been turned, or he is turning. He has heard a voice which has indeed convinced him of his sin and of his nakedness, but also of his folly in trying to find a hiding-place from the universal presence—a shelter from the all-penetrating eye. *And now* (thinking that he heard some tenderness mingling with authority in the call), he has turned, and sees a father's face, and the open shelter

of a father's presence, to which he may flee; now he hears, not merely the arresting call, "*where art thou,*" but the winning, heart-melting invitation, "come to me and I will give you rest"—"come to my presence and you will have a safe protecting shelter from all the evils you dread." And here in the text is the answer to that invitation—"I flee unto thee to hide me."

(*a.*) "I flee unto thee to hide me" *from the terrors of the law.* He alone can hide us from these terrors. *But he can.* In his presence we are lifted, as it were, above the thunders of the mountain; we see its lightnings play beneath our feet. The trumpet, sounding long, and waxing louder and louder, is like distant music. Or rather, as the apostle puts it, we are not come at all to the mount that might be touched. We have *been* there. We have seen its dread revealings. But now we come to another mountain, where God reveals a still fuller presence—to Mount Zion, the place of his rest, where no thunders crash, where no lightnings play, where no darkness lowers, around which are the breathing airs of mercy and the musical whisperings of love. But what! is not justice on Mount Zion as well as on Mount Sinai? Yes, but there she is justice in repose, justice satisfied, justice in league with love. He who finds his hiding-place with God in Christ does not flee *from* justice; he goes to meet it. In God, the saint's refuge, justice also has eternal home; and purity, over which no shadow can ever pass;

and law—everlasting, unchanging law—so that the trusting soul goes to meet all these and to be in alliance with all these. When we say, therefore, that by the gospel we flee to God to hide us from the terrors of law, we do not mean that we make a clever and expert escape from the just claims of the law, and that we rise in some mysterious way above its obligation and power. No; for in accepting salvation, we accept of that which honours, satisfies, confirms the law. "Do we make it void," says the apostle, through our "faith?" God forbid; nay, we establish the law. "*Grace reigns;*" but how? "through *righteousness*," unto eternal life. The glory of the gospel is this, that it reveals God's mercy and saves the sinner's soul without casting a stain or a shadow upon immaculate justice—nay, in a manner that enhances, at least to our apprehension, the lustre of divine holiness, and confirms the stability of the divine throne.

What is the law of grace of which the apostle speaks, and under which all Christians are? What but the pure unalterable law of God, kept with us and for us by Christ, written in us by the spirit, held over us by love? —the same law, honoured now by our conscience, obeyed by our will, accepted by our whole nature, loved for Christ's sake, and so working in us by Christ's power, as to transform us into the perfect image of him who saves us that we may be like him, and with him for ever.

Thus we flee unto God to hide us from the terrors of law.

(*b.*) "I flee unto thee to hide me" *from the hostility and the hatred of men.* This was a flight that David often took, and in fact this is *the* fleeing mentioned in the text. "Deliver me, O Lord, from mine enemies. I flee unto thee to hide me." He was greatly misjudged, he was deeply maligned, the tongue of slander was often busy with his name, the brow of scorn frowned on him, the arrows of hatred stuck fast in him. In many a psalm he speaks of his "*persecutors*," of his "*enemies*," of such as sought his soul, watched for his halting, and rejoiced when he was moved. He was deeply moved by such treatment, the very nobleness of his nature made him the more susceptible of pain, heart-pain, under such ungenerous and malignant treatment; and oftentimes he found no relief until he rose altogether above the human sphere, and cast himself in humble but confident appeal on "him that judgeth righteously." He transferred his case away from every earthly tribunal to *his* court and presence who knoweth the thoughts and trieth the reins of the children of men. Sometimes he reasons about his integrity, protests his innocence, vindicates his character, office, procedure, and then in a moment he seems to drop argument, appeal, protestation—they fall broken and worthless from his hands—and his soul goes up with a cry to the bosom of God, and there finds hid-

ing-place and home. "In thee do I trust." "I lift up my soul unto thee." "I flee unto thee to hide me." Then he is like a child who has come fainting in from a winter storm, and is now cradled and sleeping on the parent's breast. Believer, if you have David's faith, you have David's refuge. The name of the Lord is an high tower, into which all the righteous run and are safe. That tower has stood unmoved amid the changing centuries and the dashing storms. That tower has always had a goodly company of the persecuted within it. It has been the grand asylum of the church militant, the last but safe retreat of many a noble heart. From every place where God's people have been living among their enemies, and sometimes even from among their friends, the prayer has been going up, or rather the trustful heart has been going up with the prayer within it, "*I flee unto thee to hide me.*" Solomon says, "Be not righteous overmuch." It is not quite his meaning, but perhaps it is not very far from his meaning, at any rate it is in full harmony with it, to say, "Be not overmuch anxious to prove that you *are* righteous. Be content to *be* righteous. Fret not thyself in any wise about self-justifying. Lift the case up on high; and if the storm is loud and the battle strong, think of your soul's resting-place, think of the tranquil presence, *flee* to it, and closing your heart to man open it all to God as you cry, "I flee unto thee to hide me."

(*c*.) "I flee unto thee to hide me" from the trials and calamities of life. There are many such trials that come to us in our passage home, even if we have no enemies; "if all men speak well of us," better far than we deserve; if we have "honour, love, obedience, troops of friends," we are not to think it strange if we have troops of trials too. But what are these trials under *his* management but troops of friends as well. Each one of them carries blessing. With the bitterness there is balm. After the stroke comes the healing, the clear shining after the rain. The darkest calamity of life has love in the heart of it. All things work together for good to them that love God, to them whom God loves. Yes, with a will, as we say, they work. There is no will in the dead things, but there is a will of God working in them—a breathing, loving will of God—that will so control and manage them that every one of them shall be to us like a very angel—like a ministering spirit ministering to an heir of salvation. Do you say you do not *feel* this? You do feel it if your trials are drawing you or driving you to God. Ah! in our blindness we do not know how much our afflictions are enriching us even now. One trial perhaps is like a great black wall of limitation, and we gaze upon it in blank astonishment, and wonder how it is we are so hemmed in. How it is? Why, it is because beyond that wall, if we could go, we should slide down slippery places, and fall into the bottomless pit of destruction.

A storm comes to a ship in mid-voyage. She is driven far out of her course, and is glad at last to find shelter in some friendly port. But there would soon have been shipwreck in the fair weather. The sunken rock, the unknown current, the treacherous sand, were just before the ship. The storm was her salvation. It carried her roughly but safely to the harbour. And such is affliction to many a soul. It comes to quench the sunshine, to pour the pitiless rain, to raise the stormy wind and drive the soul away to port and refuge, away to harbour and home within the circle of divine tranquillity—in the deep calm of the everlasting presence. God will keep his people in this position until *all* these earthly calamities are overpast, and the cry is heard no more from any, "I flee unto thee to hide me," but all unite in saying, We will dwell in the house of the Lord for ever.

(*d.*) "I flee unto thee to hide me" from the fear and from the tyranny of death. This is the very last flight of the godly soul. It has surmounted or gone through every evil now but one: "The last enemy that shall be destroyed is death." Terrors of law, assaults of men, shocks of temptation, adversities of life, afflictions of the soul—these are all gone by. The soul has gone through all that tribulation, and has now but one conflict more, one short struggle between it and life eternal, and yet that one short struggle seems more, sometimes, to the

soul's fear than all the trials of life beside. There are many things about death that make it thus tremendous and solemn. It is a dire necessity—"there is no discharge in that war." It is an impenetrable mystery—the grave keeps every secret, and all is silent within the veil. It is a conclusive and irrevocable crisis—the soul makes no returning step, the pathways of mortality are left for ever. It is felt to be the threshold of eternity—the gate opening immediately into blessedness or woe. It is the leaving of all mortal companionships, and the going away, *alone*, into an unknown place, into an untried being. *Yes; alone*, unless your soul knows the Psalmist's secret, and can take up the Psalmist's song—"*I flee unto thee to hide me.*" Then all will be changed. The dire necessity will soften itself into a law of love. The impenetrable mystery will be as the shadow of an angel's wing. The irrevocable crisis will be the bounding of the captive into liberty. The loss of the mortal companionship will be far more than repaired by the formation of higher fellowships, and by the immediacy of the presence of God. Look how softly yet triumphantly the pilgrim can thus pass from our sight! The shades of night are falling around him. He sees the deepening darkness, and cries, "I flee unto thee to hide me." In the flight the darkness descends, and for a little haply we hardly know whether he is in refuge. But listen! There is now another song. He *has* made

the last flight. He has reached the refuge. "I will fear no evil, for *thou* art with me." And yet again, from farther distance, there is borne back to us this sweet strain—"*Thy rod and thy staff they comfort me.*" And then we hear no more, or we hear but broken syllables, for death is just passing; but on the *other side* is heard, in bursting glory tones, "And I will dwell in the house of the Lord for ever!"

And now you have the alternative before you.

Will you pursue the sinner's flight, or will you be hid in the saint's refuge?

Will you be a fugitive and an outlaw, or a recognised and protected subject of the kingdom?

Will you be a portionless and weary-footed wanderer, or will you be a home-loving and home-coming child?

Will you battle with the storms of life single-handed, or will you flee to that sanctuary from which you will be able to look out upon them as men look from a sheltered dwelling, upon driving clouds and an angry sea?

Will you go, as a solitary traveller, into eternity, and meet all its terrors and sublimities alone, or will you have "*the Eternal God for your refuge*, and around you the everlasting arms?"

I know what your reason says when this case is submitted to you. I know what your conscience testi-

fies. I know what your heart is telling you. But I cannot tell what you will do. I can only hope and pray, as do many more, that you will turn you now to the stronghold, as a prisoner of hope, that you will declare yourself at last in eternal sanctuary, and solemnly commit all—your body and your soul, your life and your death—into the keeping of your God.

God the only Portion.

Whom have I in heaven but thee? and there is none upon earth that I desire besides thee. My flesh and my heart faileth; but God is the strength of my heart and my portion for ever.—PSALM lxxiii. 25, 26.

GOD alone can fill and satisfy our souls. Whom have we in heaven but him? And there is none upon the earth worthy of *all* our desire besides him. With the writer of this psalm this is not a quick or hasty conclusion. He has gone through long courses of trial and experience. He has made many attempts, in different ways, but the end of all is this—that God is the only portion.

"*Whom* have I in heaven but thee?" Not *what* have I. He feels as every thoughtful and wise person must feel, that *things* can never satisfy, in whatever abundance, variety, and beauty they might be provided on earth or in heaven. Not in *things*, but in *persons*, the personal soul must find its portion. Not in *many*, but in *One*, to whom the soul can look, to whom at all times it can come, and to whom, as here, it can lift up its cry, "*Thou art the strength of my heart, and my portion for ever.*"

I will try to point out in how many respects it is true that God alone can meet all our need, satisfy all our desire, and be a portion to our living souls for ever.

I.

God alone can meet our sinfulness.—This is mentioned first, because it *is* first in present importance to us. We *are* sinners, and that affects everything else. There may be any amount of slumbering grandeur in us, but it cannot get out for sin. If it comes out it is covered, or shadowed, or stained with sin. Sin keeps us from being to each other what we might and should be if we had none. Creature could never be "portion" to creature, but the mutual relations would be far more close and pleasant and helpful if sin were absent. What an angel is to an angel, a man might be to a man, in regard to thought and joy and worship, if there were no sin. But a man cannot meet a man in wholeness because of sin. Perhaps there is not a man upon earth who would be willing, or who would be able, to spread out before another man his entire and inmost consciousness. And the feeling that he cannot do that, and that he must not do that, interrupts or rather prevents the fellowship which might be. Men meet each other with great mutual secrets in their hearts—secrets and sorrows which they do not exchange, which they do not lighten by sympathy, which each feels he must bear

alone. A man is accosting his neighbour in neighbourly kindness, and thinking the while, "He does not know me, and I durst not tell him what I think and what I feel and what I am. If I were sure he would understand everything just as it is, I *might* be able to tell him; but being sure that he would not understand, I cannot." Now we are not speaking of any *great* sins or vices which particular men may have committed, and the remembrance of which they carry within, like ghastly skeletons shut up in closed rooms, but just of the secret of sinfulness which is in *every* heart. A terrible secret! A secret which *must* be told, which cannot be shut up for ever. But to whom? Shall the soul tell it to the soul? Of what use? The only response to the tale is condemnation. "Our own hearts condemn us." Or to others? It is impossible, as we have seen. They would not understand, and they could not forgive. Man has no power to take sin away from man. Then to whom? To him who is greater than the heart, and who knoweth all things. To him, in fact, *because* he knoweth all things. He knows all we can tell, and far more. He is greater than the heart, and sees in it all the sin that is there—every root and spring of evil. To him we are to unfold our whole state, in so far as we know it. And then, according to his own promise, he will meet us and take all our sin away. "He that covereth his sins shall not prosper;

but he that confesseth and forsaketh them shall have mercy."

It is remarkable that God in declaring *himself* and pronouncing his own "*name*," so often makes reference to man's sin, and to his own gracious purpose of forgiveness. Nearly always when he says, "I will be a God unto you," he adds the assurance, "I will forgive your sins." "Come, now, and let us reason together, saith the Lord." And about what? God knows full well that there will be no reasoning on other things until *this* dark thing is out of the way. He knows that this is the thing which is first in *our* thought when we draw near to him, and so he "prevents us." He takes the first word. He speaks out the great secret to our face. "Though your sins be as scarlet they shall be white as snow; though they be red like crimson they shall be as wool." "I, even I, am he that blotteth out thy transgressions for mine own sake, and will not remember thy sins!" "In those days, and in that time, saith the Lord, the iniquity of Israel shall be sought for, and there shall be none: and the sins of Judah, and they shall not be found, for I will pardon them whom I reserve." "I have blotted out as a thick cloud thy transgressions, and as a cloud thy sins; return unto me, for I have redeemed thee." All these passages show very clearly how God put at that time this question of sin in the forefront of all his dealings with man. If he

would manifest his own glory and have his name known, he must forgive sin. If he would restore the broken fellowship, and have "reasonings" and communings with man, he must forgive sin. If he would have service from him of the will and of the heart, it can never be while there is unpardoned sin. In one word, if God would be God and portion to a sinful soul, he must take the sin away, and therefore he must reveal himself as "pardoning iniquity, transgression, and sin" —that is, sin of every kind and of every degree. And he knew that *then* every forgiven soul would turn to him and say, "Whom have I in heaven but thee? and there is none upon earth that I desire besides thee." "Who is a God like unto thee, pardoning iniquity, transgression, and sin?" And there is no change of procedure in these respects under the gospel. The gospel is this, that there should be the "preaching of repentance and remission of sins in his name, in the name of Christ, among all nations, beginning at Jerusalem." And this, that "God hath highly exalted him with his right hand to be a prince and a Saviour, for to give repentance to Israel and forgiveness of sins." And this, that "we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of his grace." *Thus* he makes himself our God by meeting our sinfulness. If he would offer to take you as you are, with the dread secret of your nature untold, he could not be

your God. He might tell you of his love, he might strew your path with gifts, and, opening heaven's gates, say, "*come up hither.*" But, although you might enter in, you would still be far from heaven indeed, and far from him who is the joy of all his people.

But because he knoweth the thought of man and telleth it, because he searcheth the hearts and trieth the reins, that he may purify and cleanse all that he searches; because it is his wont to remove the transgressions of those who come to him "as far from them as the east is distant from the west," therefore he is their God, and they, turning to him, can exclaim, "Whom have we in heaven but thee? and there is none upon earth that we desire besides thee."

II.

God alone can meet our feebleness.—There is surely no need to enforce at great length the doctrine of our frailty. It is sufficiently exemplified in the daily history and experience of mankind. We are just as weak as we are sinful. We are weak in body; so weak that we never know *what* disease of the hundreds to which flesh is heir, shall seize upon our vitals, ending the joy of the day, and banishing the sleep of the night. We are weak in mind; so weak that we cannot tell what tremors shall seize us, what misgivings of thought, what perplexities of vision, what falterings of the firmest of

our purposes, what sore travail of the spirit as we journey on through this world of shadow to a life eternal. We are weak in faith; so weak that it is doubtful sometimes to our own mind whether we are in the faith at all, whether we are apprehending that for which we are apprehended. We are compassed with infirmities; we are made up of needs. Some men are longer than others in finding this out, and some longer than others in confessing what their hearts have long known. But all know in a measure, and soon or late all will fully know, that "all flesh is grass, that all the glory of man is as the flower of the grass." Now the question is, on what or on whom shall we stay ourselves? Where shall we find the centre of reliance which never moves? Where abides the everlasting strength? Who will lead us to the rock that is higher than we?

Some are so utterly blinded and bewitched that for a while they seem to indulge the hope that *this world* is the foundation-rock on which they can rest, and that a happy conjunction of circumstances will form a fair house which they will build on that rock for inhabitation and soul-content. How we should pity such men! And how pitiable indeed they become when they are undeceived; when the seeming rock shews itself to be but shifting sand; when the fair house shivers itself to atoms in their hands, and they stand houseless and homeless in the storm.

Then some in a higher mood say (are taught to say) that they will find the centre of rest and the nourishment of strength in themselves. They will defy the world, or at least they will rise above it. They will be a world and a portion to themselves. They will appeal to what is noblest; they will nourish what is purest; they will try to do what is right. They will be true to themselves; and *so*, let the changes come, and the storms blow by. Are any of you building such a house as this—a house formed on your own personality, and on your own supposed strength, and composed of such virtues as you can make? I warn you that this house also is "built on the sand," and that the superstructure is as frail as the foundation is treacherous. This house also will fall, and great will be the fall of it.

And then there are others who stay themselves much upon their fellow-men—"upon an arm of flesh." The delights of friendship are dear to them, and dearer still the joys of love. They live by the whispers of approbation, they work by the touches of help, they breathe in an air of sympathy, and seem almost as if they thought that the favourable award of those whom they venerate, and love, and lean upon, would be enough to brace their feebleness at all times, and bear them away at last through death to life. Now, God forbid that we should utter one word which would even *seem* to detract from the preciousness of human sympathy, and the efficacy of christian

help. We are in life and death *together*. He means us to go hand in hand in sorrow and in joy. But you know little of life, and little of death, if you have not seen one and another floated off from all such helps, and for a while tossed in a sea of dark amazement, until they have found, as they never found before, the one and only rock of trust. And if ever God has given you the privilege of beholding that sight, you will carry with you the sense of the greatness and sublimity of it as long as you live. It *is* sublime to see the sick at rest, while those who watch are in trouble for their sake—to see strength and calmness on the dying face, not a tear on the cheek, not a shadow on the brow, while the living weep and pray and struggle in vain against the providence which they cannot overcome. And what is the secret and explanation of it all? Simply this, that God is the strength of their heart and their portion for ever. They have retired from their friends that they may come nearer to them in the end! They have renounced them that they may be true to them. They are "departing from them for a season that they may receive them for ever." May God give *us* to learn this lesson in good time, long before the dying day shall come; for he *is* the only sure stay of our feebleness, the only strength of our hearts. And he will have us all and each to be strong only in him—that we may the better bear each other's burdens, and help each other along the way. When we meet in joy he will

have the salutation spoken, "God is our glory and the lifter up of our head!" When we flee to each other in sorrow, he will have the sacred whisper to go round, "God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble." Wherever we are, in life or in death, in grace or in glory, he will have each to turn from all other to him, and say, "Whom have I in heaven but thee? and on the earth there is none whom I desire besides thee. My flesh and heart faileth, but thou art the strength of my heart and my portion for ever."

III.

God only can meet our nobleness.—For we *are* noble, as well as frail and sinful. Things high and low meet strangely in our nature. We are made in the image of God. The image is marred, but not erased. It shines out in every man who turns his face upwards to God. We belong to a fallen race; but that is not the whole truth—we belong also to a rising race. God is raising us, and we are rising to meet him in the gospel. This is our nobleness, that we are still his sons, that we are awakening to a consciousness of our high lineage, that we are coming back to receive our inheritance, that we are heirs of God, and joint-heirs with Christ. And God alone can meet us in this. As he alone can understand the depths and aggravations of our individual sin; as he alone can understand the frailties of our nature and

the vastness of our needs, so he only can understand the greatness of our desire and the strength of our endeavour to be like him, and with him again. We misread, we misjudge, and then we misreport, each other woefully. We are on the homeward way *together*, and no doubt there is thus great mutual help, but there is mutual hindrance as well. One often casts a shadow on the path of another. He looks with a clouded brow, with mistrustful eye. He speaks in a hesitating tone. He seems to see nothing but the wrong things, and the weaknesses; the rightness and the growing strength are within, and are seen only by him who looks from above. It is not only that the wrong things are seen, and the weaknesses are noted, but often the right is called the wrong, and treated so. The signs of purity are interpreted as signs of guilt; diffidence is confounded with pusillanimity; self-distrust with unfaithfulness; a zealous energy is sneered at as officiousness; openness of action is called ostentation;—there is no end of the misjudgments which are common now among men, and even among Christians. No doubt the temper of suspicion and distrust is fostered by the publicity which everything now receives, or rather by the malign prominence given in our daily literature to the vile and the wrong things. For the good things are not published; they are put into quiet corners; a thousand of *them* may be enacted by effort and by sacrifice, by patience,

and perseverance, and love—in short, amid all the signs and evidences of moral nobleness—and no notice will be taken, or your grand writer will make some lofty reference to them in a tone of mingled magnanimity and pity. But if some wretched creature shall break out in crime disgusting or awful, *that* shall have great publicity and due philosophic comment. The much-vaunted publicity which everything gets by the press, is in large part the publicity of the evil and dark side of our social life. It is the publicity of amusements, and follies, and immoralities, and vices, and crimes. Read the daily journals from the beginning of the year to the end of it, you will find but little of the nobleness of human nature and human life in the things recorded and commented on. Indeed, it is well enough known that some of our leading writers altogether disbelieve in nobleness. They set forth the doctrine of universal selfishness in all its varieties, adopt the tone of depreciation towards everything which professes to be on another level, whisper suspicions of all goodness that is on principle and for the love of God, and seem to be perpetually renewing the great covenant of insincerity, and teaching men to whisper to each other—"*We* know! beneath all the outward seeming and show of social life, we know the inner deceptions; we know that, after all, it is each man for himself, and that virtue and even God are only names." I say that is a horrible doctrine. anti-social and inhuman as

well as ungodly. It is put forth in all the felicities of a fascinating style, and managed with so much adroitness that even the noblest are made to wince. They are surprised with quick glimpses of their own imperfections, and then pressed with the inconsistency of *pretending* to have any more goodness left. This uncandid temper, this extreme unwillingness to see moral inequalities among men, this strange desire to strike down the lofty and lay them with the low, rather than toil for the elevation of the low to the level of the lofty, is becoming quite one of the operative principles of our intellectual and social life, and of course it affects the church also. Suspicion is bred among Christian men. One does not see how God is working in another, how the glorious image is shining out again—"it doth not *yet* appear what we shall be." We are in mutual disguise, and we have the mutual discomforts of being unknown to each other. All this is trying enough, but at least it should enhance and endear to us the truth we are now enforcing, that God alone can meet our nobleness. How precious the privilege of being able to turn *to him* when we can turn to no one else! *He* knows. He makes no mistakes. He sees, not the sin alone, but also the hatred of it. Not weakness alone, but also the inward strength which will outlive that weakness. He sees the faltering nerve, but he sees also the unfaltering purpose. He sees the law in the mem-

bers, but also the holier and stronger law of the mind. He sees that evil is often present with us, and yet that we *would* do good all the while. He sees that we are carnal, sold under sin; he sees, far more, that we are spiritual, redeemed under grace. He knows that the flesh is weak; he knows also that the spirit is willing. He hears the cry from many a struggling soul, "*O wretched man that I am!*" but while others, who may hear it also, only echo back the cry, and say, "Oh, wretched indeed!" he gives it far different interpretation. To him it is the cry of struggling nobleness, of purity out of sin. He meets that cry with all his sympathy, and will finally grant the deliverance that is desired. He will smite the sin and nourish the virtue; he will take away the wretchedness and raise *the man*. Turn then to him with all your unsuspected desires, with all your unappreciated purposes, with the actions that are misjudged, with the life which no one knows. Flee from father and mother, from brother and sister, to him. From thine own self escape and flee to him. All your nobleness will go with you in that act. You will come out of the chill which unmerited suspicion may have cast around you; out of the shadow of your own fears, and your soul will recover itself in this, as in other things, by making that last and highest appeal, "*Whom* have I in heaven but thee? and on the earth there is none whom I desire besides thee."

Many other illustrations of the same fundamental truth might be found. It would be easy to shew how God alone can meet our love with his own infinite and unwearying love, and our reverence with his unchanging perfections. But I must take a closing proof and illustration of the main truth of the text in the case of our immortality.

IV.

God alone can meet and satisfy our immortality. He only is "the strength of our heart, *and our portion for ever.*" Even if the things and the persons we are so apt in our haste and blindness to put in the place of *him could* be to us what we hope and what we wish in any satisfying measure at all, the question still remains, and is pressed home on us by all the changes of this vain and ever-shifting life, "*For how long?*" and turn where we will, we can find no answer of such a kind as to furnish the ground of confidence, or even of unwavering hope, for a single day. Try to apply the great language of the text to any person, to any thing, but him, and what a mockery it will be! Say to the most favourable conjunction of circumstances you are able to make, "my portion for ever!" and ere the profane expression is well out of your lips, the broken echoes of the answer will come back to you from all the fragments of these dissolving circumstances, as they break up and float away for evermore. Or speak the words to friends—the nearest, and

the dearest, and the best—and then look, and lo! they are gone. Listen! and one will answer you from the sea, across which in homeward voyage he will never come; and one from the city, where he is forming connections and gathering cares which will draw him away from you; and one from the sickbed, from which he will rise no more; and one from the grave, *death* will answer for him, and say, "I have him here asleep, and unless you can sound the trumpet for resurrection he cannot hear." And so you are left with "for ever" in your soul, but with hardly "to-day" written anywhere around, and with "to-morrow" dim and all unknown! Will you then turn within and say, "If I have 'for ever' *there*, if the principle of invincible life has been created, if the flame of immortality is already burning, I will seek *there* my rest, and cling to myself through eternal life?" You will be met with a cry of agony from your own heart, the cry for a *portion*, other than itself, greater, better than itself. And so from without and from within you will be alike disappointed; and time will move on with silken footstep, and change will weave her mocking colours, and the mower Death will sway his scythe, and all things "full of labour" will hasten to the promised rest, while your soul, unsatisfied and unresting, is floating away as into the depths of a mornless night, as among the billows of a shoreless ocean, as into a pathless and homeless world. God help

you, immortal man, if you are in such a case! And God *will* help you if you turn to him. He has waited long to catch one desiring glance of your eye, to hear one homesick sigh from your heart. He is waiting now as earnestly and as lovingly as ever before. *He* is all and infinitely more than all you need. He will forgive your sin. He will strengthen your feebleness. He will nourish your greatness. He will satisfy your love. He will receive your worship. He will glorify your immortality. He will be himself, with all his immutable perfections, and with all the gifts and resources of his salvation, "*your portion for ever.*"

Turn, then, from sin to God, from frailty to God, from trouble to God, from baffled endeavours to God, from unrequited love to God, from self to God, from men to God, from the world to God, from heaven to God, from eternity to God; and standing, separated and alone, on the height of this decisive hour, say, while heaven hears the cry, and angels register the vow—"Whom have I in heaven but thee? and there is none upon earth that I desire besides thee. My flesh and my heart faileth, but God is the strength of my heart, and my portion for ever." And then one more soul will be at rest. No perceptible difference will be made in outward things, and yet one more of God's great triumphs will be won. "All things" will still seem to "happen alike to all." To-morrow there will be the

rising and the setting of the sun, and the rushing of the great rivers of human life through the city streets; and gaiety will light her lamps, and sorrow will have her tears, and death will be busy reaping on his great harvest-field, and the preachers who preach a strange morality without a God will cry, "Vanity of vanities, all is vanity." But one more soul will be at rest with God. . . . I plead for this. "As though God did beseech you by us, we pray you in Christ's stead, be ye reconciled to God." He is stretching out his hands. He is opening his very heart. He is looking at your vacant place in his house. He is listening for your footfall. He is longing to have you home. Come without lingering more, and sing now with all who know him this glad new song, "God is the strength of my heart, and my portion for ever."

Life as a Structure.

For other foundation can no man lay than that is laid, which is Jesus Christ. Now if any man build upon this foundation gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, stubble; every man's work shall be made manifest; for the day shall declare it, because it shall be revealed by fire; and the fire shall try every man's work of what sort it is."—1 CORINTHIANS iii. 11-13.

THE apostle is speaking here of ministers and their teachings. He is explaining what relations they sustain to the master, to one another, and to the church —that they are not the heads of parties but the servants of Christ; not rivals of each other, but co-workers; not free to teach this or that as natural ideas or fancies might incline, but under the most solemn obligation to teach only "the wisdom of God" for the enlightenment and salvation of men. As it is *the work* chiefly, and not the office of the minister, which is thus discussed, we can have no difficulty, and there can be nothing but benefit, in applying the whole subject to the Christian people. For, after all, a minister's work is but the giving a little help, instrumentally, to men in the doing of their own. When, as here, the soul is the house or temple, the real builder is the soul itself. A minister in

such a case can only be what the name imports—an attendant, a servitor. He can bring the good materials; he can take away the rubbish; he can tell the actual workman *how* to build; but the real builder is the man himself. As then this matter concerns us all equally, let us all try to learn what we are here taught for our edification and salvation. There is here a foundation laid; a building to be raised; a time given to finish the work; and a trial of the work when it is done.

I.

A Foundation Laid.—The idea couched in this figure is the radical idea, which runs through the whole of the Scriptures, that something must be done out of and apart from the man, to enable him even to *begin* his proper life before God. It must be something exterior to the man, yet having vital and effectual relations to him. No one can begin to live rightly and well just as he is. That is the invariable teaching of the Bible. A human character, by purely natural development, would not "grow into an holy temple in the Lord." For that there is required a firm basis, and such a basis is not found in the human being as he is. Sin has gone to the very springs of our nature. It has touched and tainted the deepest things in us. The most natural, the most organic things in us are polluted and enfeebled by its presence. We hold no part of our nature in purity. We

can discover no perfect powers which "retain their integrity." We cannot even begin. And this is not only the Bible teaching, but the conviction of almost the whole world. In heathen, as well as in Christian countries, men know and feel that some external foundation is needed. Men are self-righteous, but there is hardly any man who would openly and boldly profess complete *self*-reliance before God and his eternal laws. Immense numbers of men are busy in the vain attempt to lay a foundation of their own. In their worship, their gifts, their sacrifices, their actions, they are carrying the materials to throw into the gulf; and as builders drive in piles into the marshy ground, and throw in vast loads of earth and stones, making a pretty good foundation in the end, on which they rear their house to last for its century or two, so men in imagination carry out of themselves their merits, their good deeds, their sufferings, their penitential regrets, their recognitions of divine mercy—these or such like things they endeavour to lay down as a substantial basis on which they may raise the fair structure of hope and happiness. Vain toils, whether conducted in pride or in sorrow! The gulf is too deep to be filled up by man, the materials which are cast into it have no real strength or worth. They are fallacious, perishable things. They "come out of the man," and they are "defiled." God, looking down on all these futile although laborious en-

deavours, says, in condemnation of, yet in pity for, the workers, "Behold, *I lay* in Zion for a foundation a stone, a tried stone, a precious corner-stone!" Or, as it is in the verse preceding the text, "other foundation can no man lay than that is laid, which is Jesus Christ."

Jesus Christ, then, is the foundation. We cannot take these words too literally. The foundation of all this world's hopes, in the plan of God, and of every man's salvation, is Jesus Christ himself—the personal historical Christ, who was born in Bethlehem, and lived in Nazareth, and died on Calvary. This is the stone which was rejected of the builders, but which God has made the head of the corner. In contending for the literal meaning, we do not exclude the doctrinal. All true doctrinal meanings are included. The deity, the humanity, the vicariousness, the righteousness, the love, the sorrow, tears, and blood, and death, and resurrection, and victorious ascent "through all heavens to fill all things,"—all these things, with many besides, are included in the simple historical, yet grand and joyful language, "other foundation can no man lay than that which is laid, which is Jesus Christ."

We are not describing this foundation itself. That were too vast a theme. An adequate description would take us back into a dim eternity; would require us to traverse the successive dispensations of time; to note the symbolical meanings of persons, and offices, and

events, the sublime evolution of the divine purposes, and the culmination and accomplishment of all in the appearance of the Messiah in the fulness of time, travelling in the greatness of his strength and mighty to save. It falls more within the scope of this text to note the fact, that the foundation *is* laid. The needed work, external to man, external also in a sense to God, is done. "It is finished." "He has trodden the wine-press alone." In righteousness, in sorrow, in love unapproachable, he performed the great atoning work, and now proclaims from heaven and through all the earth by his gospel, that it *is* finished. We must ultimately rest in this matter on the divine assurance. Soon or late we come to that. It is more expressly of the nature of the gospel to say, "It *is* finished," than to shew us *how* it is finished. The gospel is a message, far more than an argument; an announcement of work done, rather than a discussion as to the way of doing it. It is not a *mere* proclamation, not a bare announcement. It is visibly grounded on great principles which all can recognise, and supported by reasons which all can see. It professes very expressly to put itself in harmony with law, with conscience, with moral government everywhere; with all that is greatest in God, and all that is best in man. And in a measure we see, by our reason and our moral sensibilities, *how* the conciliation is accomplished. But only in a measure. In our most penetrative thought we

cannot reach the very heart of atonement. There is something still, beyond our most quickened and spiritual perceptions. As we draw near to the cross, the shadow falls, as if some of the darkness which rested on the land from the sixth until the ninth hour were still lingering. We are among "the deep things of God." How *should* we understand *his* exceeding sorrowfulness even unto death? Seeing something, we feel far more. We stand in awe and amazement, with blinded reason, with faltering thought, while from the depths of that great world of justice and sorrow there comes, to our infinite relief and joy, the assurance, spoken by the voice of infinite love, "It is finished." On this we rest. On this we ask all men everywhere to rest. The foundation of God standeth sure. We are safe, we are strong, if we build on that. And other foundation can no man lay. Ten thousand busy builders, all over the world, are laboriously seeking other foundations, or building on the foundations they seem to have found. But what is the chaff to the wheat, saith the Lord? What is the sand or the quagmire to the rock? The foundation laid by God himself must be the true one, and his own solemn and express assurance that we find it here, in Jesus Christ, is infinitely better to us than all the conclusions of the reason and all the virtues of the life. We believe the witness of man, the witness of God is greater. This is God's witness, that he has laid a foundation in Zion,

on which we may all build for time and for eternity. I, wishing to be one of his true messengers, proclaim to you this finished work of God. I come to you with no doubtful statements, with no unsolved problems, with no philosophical difficulties, with no impossible conditions. I point you to an open door, I shew you a revealed mercy-seat, I make free and unrestricted offer of complete salvation. This is the message that God hath given to us, eternal life, and that this life is in his Son. There are many mysteries yet unsolved, but *this* is clear, that God has laid the foundation. There is a great work yet to do, but that part of *his* work which we need as the groundwork of ours is done, and done for ever. The foundation *is* laid. But now

II.

There is a building to be raised.—A foundation without a building is a solecism, a name. One place of this world is just as much a foundation as another unless you see a rising structure. The structure in this case is to be raised by the man. God as it were retires after laying the foundation, calls the man forward into the chief place, and pointing to the preparatory work he has himself accomplished says, "If any man build on this foundation—what? He tells us what—what we may and what we ought to build. We *may* build a house. We *ought* to build a temple. The apostle seems to refer

to ordinary houses when he speaks of "wood, hay, stubble." These are the materials used for common houses. "Wood" was used for the posts and doors; "hay," or dried grass mixed with mud, for the walls, and "stubble" or straw for the roof. These are brittle, inflammable materials used for ordinary houses, but never for temples. The temples were built of "precious stones," such as granite and marble, both durable and beautiful; and they were adorned with "gold and silver." Each man then is called to build a temple and not a house. The reference of course is to the soul, the life. "Know ye not," is the language of a subsequent verse, "that *Ye* are the temple of God?" Each man's soul and life is to be a temple of God. Nothing less. Surely a noble calling that each of us believing in Christ is required, and expected, and will be helped of God, in building up his whole existence into a living temple for the inhabitation of God through the Spirit.

Here begins the co-operative work of God and man "I will help you," saith the Lord, "in this. You shall build, and I will build also. You shall be busy, and I will be faithful. You shall think, and feel, and strive, and act, in accordance with my instructions and laws; and I will inspire, and guide, and enable, and fulfil. Work out your own salvation, and I will work in you to will and to do of my good pleasure."

This is the attitude of God in the gospel to you, to

all men who hear it. Perhaps some of you have not thought of this. You have thought in a way of the foundation he has laid almost as often as you have come to worship. You have heard of "the finished work" since you were a child, and you must have thought of it a thousand times; but you have thought of it as a thing now quite apart from God, as a thing that has gone out of his hands and away from his presence to have a kind of separate existence of its own.

The pyramids of Egypt were finished no one knows how long ago. The work of laying the foundation in Christ was finished when he bowed his head on the cross. You think of the latter, of course, with more reverence than you do of the former. But still, perhaps, the *same kind* of feeling which you have about the pyramids you have also in some respects about the cross, and the foundation of God for man laid there. It is an old fact which once happened in the history of the world, and in the development of the government of God. You look at it, and you think God looks at it, across the chill distance of nearly two thousand years. What a sad and grievous mistake! God stands close by the foundation he has laid, waiting for the builders to come. It is as if he were laying it now. He is in the work of Christ eternally. He keeps it in the freshness of perpetual life. He breathes through it at this hour the fervour, and the passion, and the love which it

expressed at first. He stands waiting for the sons of men, for you who have never yet come, to come now as builders, and *begin* that work for which alone *his* was finished. Come then to-day. Come be a builder. Come put your trust in the Lord Jesus Christ. Faith in him is the first stone laid on the foundation, and without it no other can be there, and no abiding structure can be reared. A man may be, according to the human judgment, great, and good, and happy, but if he does not believe in Jesus Christ, God's chosen foundation, and criterion for all that is great and good, his life is essentially defective, and *must* collapse in the end. It will be a mere house, frail and baseless, which the fire will burn, or the floods will carry away. Oh, sad end of a toilsome, anxious, busy life! Sad end of long journeys, happy meetings, large gains, full-handed givings, mornings of joy, nights of rest! Sad end of all life's weariness, and suffering, and grief! Sad end of much reading, much thinking, much speaking! Sad, sad end of all those precious mortal years, that nothing is built at last except what will fall and perish in flood or flame! Think of it. Think of it in time, and believe in Christ, and so begin to build—the temple of your life to God.

But, brethren, the apostle is speaking here to those who *have* begun, and in effect is saying to them, "Having begun, go on. Build diligently and carefully—

diligently that you may have a completed structure—carefully, that it may be composed of the proper materials." There is a certain kind of Christian teaching and writing which condenses everything in Christian life and experience into faith: "only believe. That is all." No, says the apostle, that is *not* all. Believe and go on to something more. Lay the first stone securely on the foundation which *is* laid, then add another, and another, and still another, without limit or stay. Act by act, day after day, let the temple grow. In the compass of three verses four several times the apostle mentions *a man's work.* "Every man's work." "Every man's work." "Any man's work." "Any man's work." So that a Christian merely believing and not working has really no standing ground in the face of this passage at all. He ought to retire for very shame. The man who always sinks back upon his faith will have no temple at last. That man is like the mason who, having laid the first stone on the solid granite rock, should stand up with trowel in hand, materials in abundance lying within reach, and busy workers around him, and say, "Now I have done, I have laid one stone on the rock!" "Go on," says the apostle, "and go on with the right materials. Lay the precious stones one upon another. Bring in the gold and silver for the enrichment and adorning of this living temple! And beware lest unwittingly you should be using the wood and the hay and the stubble, which

must perish at last." Observe, the apostle says expressly that that may be done. There is a great difference between his practical teaching in this matter, and some of our more theoretical views. We are apt to suppose that when there is a true and sincere beginning there must be in the main a prosperous ongoing. Paul says there may be a true and sincere beginning and yet not a prosperous ongoing. We make faith and repentance not only the alpha but the omega. Paul teaches that there may be faith and repentance quite true and sincere, that a man may be thus *on* the sure foundation laid in Zion, and yet that he may be rearing a very insufficient and discreditable building. A man, for instance, comes to Christ very truly. In some blessed melting time of grace he yields to him, is pardoned, renewed, and refreshed. He casts sin away from his heart, embraces the Saviour as a portion, and rejoices for a while in his complete salvation. He is received by the disciples *as* a disciple. He is welcomed into the field by the workers as a worker. He stands up as a builder among the builders. For years he keeps his place and builds on. He cannot cease from building. But *what* is he building? What is he putting into that edifice which God longs to inhabit with the fulness of his presence? "Wood, hay, stubble," low views, superficial opinions, evil tempers, worldly habits —just such things as irreligious men are building into *their* lives. At least there is no difference that a human

observer can see. Yes, this good man is doing that. He *is* a good man, for he rests on Christ, the source and the criterion of goodness. But he is a careless good man, for he is not doing Christ's will. He himself will be saved, but his work will be destroyed. Ah! is it not affecting, almost alarming, to think how the flames of the last conflagration will be fed by the worldly and bad materials which have been worked up into *Christian* lives? Then let us be careful to build with the right materials, and all the more because the wrong ones are so rife and so near. Errors of every kind, but especially religious errors, are very abundant, and some of them very specious, looking quite like truth. We shall build them up into the system of our faith, and hold them as intellectual and spiritual verities ere ever we are aware, if we do not give earnest head. Vices also abound on every hand, and some of them are so gentle, and so amiable, and so fair, at least in appearance, that they will seem to the unwatchful eye wrought with the fibre and composed into the texture of virtue. And a multitude of things are around us which cannot be called either errors or vices, which yet will make very indifferent materials for the fabric we are rearing—quiet, noiseless things, not easily described, but very potent in their influence; ways of thinking, ways of speaking, ways of acting; the spirit of the time, the spirit of the place. Such things as these, which could not be openly condemned without consider-

able qualification, may easily be built up into the personal temple, into the growth of our human life, if we do not take earnest heed. And then at last our souls will have to be rescued and brought out from them with strife and difficulty, as men are saved from a flaming house where much of their property is destroyed. These errors which seem so trivial, or perhaps so true; these vices which seem so harmless, perhaps even so good; these quiet wordly ways, so much in harmony oftentimes with popular sentiments and surrounding things;—what are they all when tried by the highest standard, and by the last day, but "wood, hay, stubble," "whose end is to be burned?"

But let no man be discouraged in this matter, as though there were but little chance of being able to build up his life without large intermixture of such inferior stuff along with the nobler materials. If a man is resolved to be discouraged and to be despondding he easily may. He may say, "see! this life, as men live it, is all full of falsehoods, vices, failings; you meet them, you live in them, at every turn. There is no chance for a man to get through in pure rightness, in unsuspecting love!" Not so. That is a jaundiced view of life. That fear is ignominious and unworthy. The good and proper materials are amply available, and they are sufficiently near. Truth, and virtue, and strength, and wisdom, and love—they are all attainable. If we

ask them they will be given to us. If we seek them we shall find. God has taken care for this. He has filled his book with truth. He has filled his providence with moral helps. If we diligently study the one and live faithfully amid the scenes of the other, he will fill *us* with his grace and salvation day by day, so that we shall grow unto an holy temple in the Lord.

In this there is a significant and happy difference between religion and everything else, between religious work and all other work. Spiritual religion is at once the grandest and the simplest thing with which men have to do. It is at once the most arduous and the most easy of all their attainments. It is most arduous because the man of highest faculty must stir up *all that is within him*, in order to its achievement; it is the most easy, because the man of simplest mind following the same rule with regard to his own far poorer faculties will certainly achieve it. The science of religion may be mastered, and the work of practical religion may be done, by any one who will put his heart to the science and his hand to the work. It is not so with the sciences and arts generally. There are continually men relinquishing studies, professions, works, for which they are found *not* suited. There are branches of philosophy of which some men never could be masters. They lack the faculty and the fitness. All their endeavours, however honestly and vigorously made, are but elongated

drudgery. There are certain arts equally beyond some men's power of achievement. They lack the sentient faculty, and no amount of education or effort will supply it. Mental science! It is to some men a mere heap of puzzling terms and attributes. Moral philosophy! It is to some men one of the surest means of perplexing and bewildering the simple sense of right and wrong. Painting! That man's eye could never perceive the delicacies and shadings of colour, still less perhaps could his hand lay them on the canvas. Music! There are some souls into which its harmonies never seem to enter; they only make a noise outside, as certainly there are fingers hard by nature, or stiffened with toil, which could never educe that harmony from the instruments. But in this, the finest of all the arts, the noblest of all the sciences, not one shall fail who honestly endeavours. Unlettered and unknown, poor and pressed down by toils and cares, a man may yet rear a structure which shall stand in strength and beauty through eternal ages. He could not carve a figure, or chisel a statue, but he can build a living temple. He could not paint a picture for his house, but he can hang the living virtues upon the inner walls of his soul. He could not number or name the powers of his own mind, but he can set them all upon their noblest objects. He is bewildered amid the distinctions of philosophy, but at home in the doctrines of God. He is lost, it may be, amid the ignoble

throng, while the great ones of this world roll past him, bright in the splendours of an evanescent life; but a great crowd of celestial witnesses have him in survey, and there is a crown and a kingdom awaiting him above. Our God hides these things from the wise and prudent, and reveals them unto babes. *This* is the one thing necessary to success—the disposition and spirit of the little child. "Am I humble, teachable, very anxious to learn? then I shall be taught of God, built up in spiritual goodness, and made a living and eternal monument to his praise."

We cannot be too thankful for this blessed and gracious certainty—the certainty that all earnest souls *must* prosper. God has so constructed the world, and he rules it so, that they *must*. He has so established his own kingdom here, with all its powers and helps, and dwells so in the heart by his Spirit, that they *must*. Not one faileth. Let a man say, anywhere in all the world, "I will arise and build," laying the edifice of his life on the deep and broad foundation of God in Christ, and pursuing the work in humble dependence, and yet with a good courage—that man is invincible, and *his work* stands in the strength of God. There may be beating rains, and swelling floods, and wild blowing winds—the work will go on through them all; the house, or rather the temple, will stand in spite of them all. There may be far more than all that. There may

be, there is, the rising up of the dark gates of hell, the gloomy and confederated forces of that malignant kingdom may be directed against every spiritual worker, and against all spiritual work. Those dark forces must be driven back. Those gates of hell never can prevail. Through storm and shade, in winter and summer alike, the work will go on. When the builder is conscious, active, busy, and when he is weary and helpless and sick, the mystic temple will still rise; and then at death the top stone will be laid on, and the angel who lays it will say of the man's work, of this whole earthly life, "It is finished" now. The night is come when he can no longer work. This leads us to say in the third place, that,

III.

There is a time given to finish the work.—And when the limit of that time shall come, not one stone more can be laid by the builder, not one touch more given to the edifice in any of its parts before the trial. "I must work the work of him that sent me while it is day: the night cometh when no man can work." And no man can tell *when* the night shall come in any particular instance. Of course we have the general laws and probabilities of life. God means us to know these laws and probabilities, and he means us to guide ourselves by them as far as we can. But, clear above them all, he holds his own sovereignty, and tells us as we work

to look at that. His are "the times and seasons," the fountains of life, and "the issues from death." He alone commands and ordains the "time to be born" and the "time to die." Those times are not alike in any two instances. In this, as in so many other points of his moral administration in this world, there is the greatest possible diversity; and *mystery* as well, so profound that our intelligence is utterly incompetent to solve it. There is not a man out of heaven who could tell us with any certainty all the reasons of an infant's death, all the reasons of an old man's life on into second infancy. Philosophers and new-school Christians will make a little prattle about the natural laws. But all that we can be told about the natural laws hardly touches the moral mysteries; and, with all these mysteries hanging over human life, and darkening into impenetrable gloom, if we try to discover the exact period of its close, it is a wonderful relief that every one who is working rightly can look up to the great ruler and arbiter of life, and say in humble trust, "My times are in thy hands."

Look at the tombstones in a grave-yard. You will see every age recorded there, from the infant of days to the sinner or the saint an hundred years old. Remember, as you read, that every name recorded (and what myriads are mouldering in the dust with *no* record above ground) is the name of a builder who, in the day

given to him, began and finished a building that will be tried by fire; and then look up and be thankful for that unerring providence which settled birth and death for each so wisely and so justly that, if they were all to live again, the birth-day and burial-day for each would be exactly the same.

Here is a stone that tells that an infant was born, and, after wrestling with mortality for but a few days, died and was buried. And it may seem as though the soul of that infant had but fluttered across the atmosphere of this world without alighting here, as, looking from your window, you sometimes see a dove flash across the sky. Depend upon it, that little history was the building of a temple, and when it was finished the angels carried it away.

Here is a stone that marks the resting-place of one who was a little worker. He had just begun to work. He had thought of God as the great Father of the world. He had looked to Jesus the good shepherd. He had begun to feel a strange power in the cross, which was drawing him away from sin and from little selfish ways, and filling his heart with the purpose to live to Christ all his days. These mere shapings and scantlings of work there were—a *little* serious thought, a little faith, a fluttering of love in the breast, some tiny steps of following after the great master: nothing, as some would say, to make a finished life—mere shapings and young

endeavours after higher things—somewhat like the houses you see children building on the sand. You are far mistaken. That little workman will never need to be ashamed. In his simple faith he found the rock of ages. In his wondering love he soared upwards to the fatherhood of God, and, when the home-call reached him, he was ready, he had finished a temple-life.

This is a maiden's name. She was young, she was fair, she was looking to the altar and the bridal-day, and lo, death came unbidden, but not to her unwelcome, for he led her up to the higher espousals of heaven. Father and mother and sorrowing lover think of the nipping of the flower, and they have written on the stone that "her sun went down while it was yet day." But there are other writings there which they see not. The angels have written "*eventide;*" the Saviour has written "*finished.*"

Here lies a merchant who was in the high noon of life and in the full stretch of his powers. He was not only gaining wealth, but spreading it among others. His name was a synonym for truth and justice and honour —and all around these are the *beginnings* he had made. Nothing was finished. Yes, *all* is finished, and he lies here.

And now we come to the grave of the old old pilgrim who remained lingering here long after those who loved him dearly and venerated every hair of his grey

head would have been glad for his own sake to see him go home. The shock of corn seemed *more* than ripe—the grain was dropping on the ground. He was blind, he was deaf, he was in pain, he was as helpless as a child. Would it not have been better that he had gone some years sooner? No, no. It was the right time. It was *his* eventide. He needed all his days to finish the temple, and all his experiences—the blindness and the deafness and the pain, and the sweet simplicities of the second childhood—he needed all. And even the infirmities of temper, it may be, as well as of body, which mingled with his last experiences, were in some way *used* by him who is wonderful in counsel and excellent in working, for the completing of his own gracious work. I say we cannot be too thankful that, amid all the diversities and uncertainties and mysteries of this life, affecting its beginning, its progress, and its close, we can look up while we build to that wise and loving providence which presides over all. And we cannot too often or too seriously remember that the great Master of that providence holds *our* life fully, constantly in his hands, and will never give it into ours. He will never tell us *when* our work is to end; and its recompense is to come. But he tells us this, that we *are building* day by day. He tells us that, while recognising the *un*certainty which to us hangs around the times and the seasons, we ought even more earnestly to recognise the

great *certainty* of a continuous and accumulating moral life. Day by day, hour by hour, the work goes on—well or ill—to his praise or to our shame. We must build. We are building. We are very apt sometimes to think that we have done nothing, and that that is the worst of it. That is *not* the worst of it. The worst of it is that *we have* done something very poor or very ill. I come home at night, and say, with sad relenting, as the shadows of reflection deepen around me, "I have done nothing at the great building to day!" O yes, but I have. I have been putting in "the wood, the hay, the stubble," where "the silver and the gold and the precious stones" should have been. I have been piling up fuel for the last fires in my own life. I cannot be a cipher even for one day. I must be a man. Nay, I must be a Christian man, faithful or unfaithful. I must grow, and build, and work, and live in some way. Oh, then, let me see that I live for Christ, that I grow into his image, and that I work a work in the moral construction of my own life which angels will crown and God will bless. For,

IV.

The fire shall try every man's work of what sort it is.—"The day shall declare it because the day shall be revealed by fire." This language evidently points to a searching scrutiny to be made at a particular time. It

points to what we call the judgment-day. It is often called "the day of the Lord." *Our* day is now. *His* day is coming. Then our day will begin once more beyond, to have no more ending. But there must be judgment before glory. The apostle brings out this idea with truthful and unsparing severity. This passage to our first thought is positively awful! He wraps the subject in an atmosphere of flame. Again, and again, and again, he mentions "*the fire!*" There is no part of divine truth more difficult to declare faithfully than this. It is the very burden of the Lord. But it is a burden that must be borne. How shall I dare stand up and try, with my soft dewy speech, with my misleading instincts, to quench God's holy fires? They will burn all the same, and be the more consuming the less men expect them. It were far wiser and far more merciful to our own souls and the souls of others, to look at the subject in all its solemnities, to meet it in our thought in all its severities, and to compel our souls to abide by its issues. Yes; for after all, those issues will be to us (if only we are *true*, however imperfect) far better than any others which by our own thought we could put in their place. If our mildness might rule God's judgment-day and quench his fires, what would it make as the result? Certainly a *mixed*, probably a miserable state for eternity. We wish to spare ourselves, to spare our sins and our likings and our labours, so that after we have gone through that last

ordeal, there may be left to us something considerable of all our earthly work. God proposes and resolves to take us through that last ordeal with all his judgment fires at furnace heat, sparing nothing that will burn, and bringing us out, if need be, with *nothing* left to us of all our sore labour under the sun, that we ourselves may be saved—saved so as by fire. And which is best? Our poor human shrinking and longing, or God's holy will? Can there be a doubt that in this as in everything else his will is best—best not only in the abstract, for him and for the universe, but also far the best for ourselves. For what! would you have "the wood, the hay, the stubble," yonder as well as here—calcined and hardened and preserved by those fires which were too feeble to consume them? Would you go up on the shore of immortality with a close-clinging vesture of imperfection, as you may have seen one, with dripping garments, come up rescued out of the sea and go shivering along the way without change of raiment? Would you come out of this dying life with some of the cerements of the grave still around you, like Lazarus raised but bound hand and foot with the grave-clothes, to walk *thus* among the sons of light in immortal glory? Would you, oh would you, have renewal even in a mitigated form, of all, or of anything that makes this life a sorrow, a burden, and a trial? Would you have probation continued, and moral strife renewed, and the down-dragging of the carnal nature,

and the lusting of the flesh against the spirit, and of the spirit against the flesh? Would you wish to cry yonder as well as here, "Oh, wretched man that I am, who shall deliver me?" Would you not rather commit yourself to God in an act of uttermost trust, and let him judge and try you according to his holy law, and also according to his unfailing mercy in Christ Jesus? I am sure you would. Ah yes, far better have his judgment than our own. Far better pass through his fires than yield to our own shrinkings. Better stand at last in his full and complete salvation, than in any respect or for any length of time come short of it. Day of God! Day of Christ Jesus our Lord, with awful yet with loving desire we would look on to thee! We would hail the very splendours which herald the king's approach, and hoping to have through grace something to shew and to keep as the fruit of all our earthly toil, we would yet make *this* our deepest solicitude and our most earnest prayer, "Lord remember *us* when thou comest into thy kingdom." The Lord grant to us that *we* (whatever may come of many of our works), that *we* may find mercy of the Lord on that day."

But let us, on the other hand, remember that nothing in us, pertaining to heart, or life, or character, which is truly Christian, can fall in those flames at last. All Christian principles and all Christian works are indestructible. The glories of the judgment, and even the

fires of hell, could not consume one atom of *anything* Christian—of faith, or love, or loyalty to Christ. And *a little* of these things is just as indestructible as much. Gold is gold always and everywhere. It will pass through any fires. If it is mingled with alloy the fire will be its salvation, and it will shine the more clearly after it has come from the furnace. So with all in you which Christ approves now. He will approve it *then*, and for ever. And you do not know how grand your faith will seem on that day, and how the *little* services you are rendering, and sometimes with only a trembling hand, will expand into nobleness, when the spirit and principle of them are known and declared. Not one precious stone which you put into your life will ever crumble, not one particle of gold or silver can perish. He whom you serve will gather up all the fragments, so that nothing shall be lost. He *is* gathering them day by day, and building them compactly together against the day of trial. And when that day shall come, when its fires shall be lighted, when what is inflammable in our lives shall catch and kindle at the first touch of the flame, we shall rejoice with an awful joy as we behold, emerging from these fires, that fair structure which will be incorruptible, undefiled, and which will never fade away.

With both Hands earnestly.

With both hands earnestly.— MICAH vii. 3.

THIS is how bad men work. At least it is how they wrought in the Prophet's time. It was a sad dark time. He looked for a good man and could not find one. He felt like one standing in an orchard or garden after the summer fruit had all been removed. Not a cluster hangs on the tree. No fig is left worth taking. The prophet felt as if the harvest of goodness, and of pious men in the earth, had all been reaped, and there were none around him but the wicked, and they—whether as private persons and in the family relations or as judges and magistrates, in whom wickedness is peculiarly heinous as corrupting the sources of human justice—they wrought evil with a will—without the least compunction or remorse—"with both hands earnestly."

Well (I say this in passing), we see how little there is of excellence in mere earnestness. Earnestness may be as fiery as the flame, and at the same time as destructive, to real life and goodness. The more earnest a man is in vital error, he inflicts, of necessity, the deeper injury on the interests of truth and men; and the more earnest

he is in wickedness, in moral wickedness, he is the greater scourge. Yet every man *should* be in earnest. And those wicked men of that old dark time, who stand before us in this picture of the prophet, with both hands stretched out to evil—they stand in the very attitude which every good man ought to assume in relation to his own work as before God. We ought to live our life and do our work "*with both hands earnestly.*"

If we could get a whole church or community to be, in regard to goodness and the working of Christian duty, what those wicked men were in regard to evil and sin, what a sight it would be, and what a thing it would be! It would be a sign that a nation was going to be born in a day, and that the redemption of the world was drawing nigh.

I.

"*Without hands.*"—There are some good men who seem to be without hands altogether. "They *have* hands, but they handle not; feet have they, but they walk not." From dawn of life until dusk they do nothing expressly for Christ. All the day passes thus in idleness with them—as to work. They could work with hands, because they do, in other things. They will express themselves (and no harm) enthusiastically, and you can see that the enthusiasm is sincere, about a song or an oratorio; their soul flows out at once on waves of music. Or, they can strive manfully enough

in a political struggle, or in a question of social right. Or, they are as diligent as the moments of the day in their business. But as soon as they come up to any expressly Christian work, both hands drop down, and there they stand—*without hands.* I know the excuses that will be pleaded, and the bars that will be put in for arrest of judgment. It will be said, and truly, "It is not all unwillingness. We are afraid. We do not like to make a high profession which might not be substantiated. We do not like to begin work which might stand like an unfinished tower to reproach us, and really be perhaps a hindrance rather than a help to the cause." Well, well; let these things be as they may. I am not judging. I cannot judge. You must judge, and that you may, I am pointing you to the fact that there you stand—a brother or a sister, as we hope, in the great family which God is gathering home. And yet you have nothing to say to those without, some of them, just on the threshold, longing to come in, waiting but a word of welcome, or the touch of a friendly hand; and you are without hands, without voice, almost without form to them. There you stand, in the heart of this agonising world, in the great toil and strife of which even the "principalities and powers," both of the light and of the darkness, are mingling, with all the means of action within easy reach of you, and yet idle, doing nothing expressly for Christ—"without hands."

One can conceive, that in certain circumstances, which, however, will never be, less harm would be done by this kind of life. If, *e.g.*, the wicked would consent to stand so; if the devil would draw off his army, and say, "*there is a truce!* there shall be no injustice in the city for some days, no evil speaking, no light foolish talking, no going to the scenes of pleasure and to the haunts of vice! And death shall whet his scythe but not use it; and the door of hell shall be shut"—why then, you *might* stand and consider, and take time. I do not say that even then it would be a becoming position for any of us to be found in. It would, however, be *less* inconsistent, and less harmful. Ah! but when you think that the great moral forces of this world are *never* still—that they are ebbing and flowing like tides, blowing like winds, drawing like gravitation, and that every living being is drawn by them towards heaven or towards hell; when you think how many of these forces are evil, and how mighty they are as well as how many! How they sweep whole streets, scarcely leaving standing-room for the good; how they circulate softly in other places, filling all the air with sweet aroma which the senses inhale with delight, but which stupifies and poisons the soul. When you think how every man is *in* the contest, with or without his knowledge, and is contested for by the higher and the lower powers; when you think how heaven and hell meet on the battle-

ground of earth; how living souls are lost or won as the battle goes on; how it *does* go on as constantly as time; how one great stream of life is flowing into the world, emptying itself full on the plain of battle, and *two* great streams of life are flowing out of it; how the angels gaze into these things as they go on, and how the glorified church is waiting to see the issues—then, do you not see that your inactivity is something more than neutrality, and that there is really some danger that you will help instead of meeting the foe; and that the curse of Meroz, if it does not hang over your head, yet swings and looms in the sky ominously near your ground. "Curse ye Meroz, curse ye bitterly!" Why? What had Meroz done to merit a curse so dreadful? Nothing. And that was the sin, that she had "*not* come up to the help of the Lord against the mighty." Perhaps you put the question, "Would you then have me undertake all kinds of direct Christian work in as many different places as can be found?" No. Nothing of the kind, at least not of necessity so. It will be not a little, it may be much, if you come to feel that *you must do something*, and feel this so as to *act* on that feeling at once. It will be something, it may be much, if you look at your talents and feel some shame that they are here in your hand, when they should have been long ago out at trading. It will be something to find that you have *a hand*, if but one, to lift up in the Great Master's service.

II.

With one hand.—This is the second state—"*With one hand!*" For so, many of his servants serve him. And this is well when it is just at the beginning of the service. No doubt a redeemed soul ought to begin under the full power of salvation, and with no reserve. But the actual beginning is often in this way. A little is attempted at first. It is done. A little more is added in a while, and still a little more, and *so* the service grows into some fulness, and the worker into some strength. You may give the leaven time to work if only you feel that it *is* working. You may be tender with the green blade if you see that it *is* green, and therefore growing. All the workers in the field may rejoice and give God thanks if they see one who has been an idler—at best a watcher *wishing* well to the work, bending his back to toil at last, and putting out his hand to grasp an instrument. He is touching it only "with one hand," but better so than not at all. More will come. He will be weary soon working with one hand. He will need the other for his own relief. He will take it if he is not discouraged. Let those who go by say, "The blessing of the Lord be upon you now; we bless you in the name of the Lord." Let them not look on with the eye of the critic and say, "The work is poorly done; we must have better workers than you; more skill, more

strength in this field." The answer would be—"Then give yourself the example of the skill and strength that are needed. Put out your own work in perfection, and continue in it in godly diligence, and that will have more influence on those who are entering and beginning than a cold criticism, however true, or a high requirement, however just." The apostles were grand workers. How did they learn? Just by following and watching him who went about doing good. Sometimes he gave them express instruction. Sometimes he sent them forth. But far oftener he just went out himself on his courses of duty, and they followed and observed. They were but one-handed men in those days; they made many mistakes. But they got the use of both hands in time. The master has always a great company of young workers, some of them young in life, some of them young in toil, but all learning, and all needing the word of encouragement from those of more experience, and sometimes the hand of help from the strong. Let all the one-handed men then hear the "*God speed*" of the older workers. If you are speaking for Christ, any where, at any time, doing but a little service in a quiet and humble way; still, God speed you in your work; the blessing of the Lord be upon you; we bless you in the name of the Lord.

But now, you will not think it is harsh, or anything but true and kind, if you are counselled and warned to go on in your work, and especially if we ask you, soon, now,

to cease working with one hand, and to work with *both*. If the older workers in a manufactory, the men of skill and ready hand, were to come and look over the work of the apprentices in a mocking spirit, or even with an air of proud superiority, these young learners might feel justly aggrieved. It would be cruel and utterly profitless. But if these men come as instructed by the master, and looking over the work in a spirit of kindliness to point out its deficiencies and to shew how these deficiencies may be amended and supplied, will there be any cause of grievance then? If they say to one and another, "Well designed, but not very well wrought; you have not been attending at this part; you have been taking the work too easily; you have been talking to your neighbours just here, and so a thread has dropt and the pattern is marred; or a stroke has been missed, and a flaw is on the work; *and here*, you have been working with one hand—trying to do it so, while the most experienced workman in all the place could not do it without using both. With both hands you must work, and watch with both eyes, if you wish to become prime and perfect workmen." Would not all this be the greatest kindness to the young workers? Now this is just what we are to say to all learners in progress,—in short, to all one-handed men, we say,

III.

"*With both hands.*"—For after all there is no perfec-

tion, even of a relative kind, with one. And the continued use of only one is a shocking imperfection in the Christian service. For as both hands have been given for use, the other will not be idle. It will be working in forbidden ways. It will be grasping the world. It will be undoing what is done with the other. It will be raising up another force of an evil kind to balance the force of a Christian activity; and so the life in a little while will be in poise and not in motion; and then in a little longer there will be motion, but the wrong way. "*With both hands*" for very safety. This means, with all the powers possessed, with all the talents given. None of them are to lie in rust, all are to go out in use. There is to be no division; there is to be no reserve; and there is to be no delay.

When we think of it, how very few things there are in the house, or in labour, or in business, that we can do with one hand! A man without an arm is considered disabled as a workman. Go into a cotton mill and look at the workers There is not a hand hanging down. They are all in use—catching up the threads, stopping the machinery for a moment, or turning it on again when some little repair has been made; and only at night, when work is done, are the arms folded for a little rest. Or look at a worker in gold or silver. Two hands are not enough for him. All kinds of delicate instruments are devised to help out their imperfections.

The man wishes he had the Briarean power, and possessed the fabled hundred hands, instead of only two. You write your letters with one hand, but you hold the paper with the other. In short, the rule is universal, and those who excel most in any thing are those who make full use of both. When David was in Ziklag keeping himself close because of Saul the son of Kish, there came to him companies of men. What kind of men? Not any kind of men. Many men would have been of no use to him there, would have been nothing but a burden. But "they were mighty men, helpers of the war; they were armed with bows, and could use *both the right hand and the left* in hurling stones from the sling, and shooting arrows out of the bow." Those are the men whom Christ needs to fight his battles, and do his work. He is training all his servants to become mighty men, helpers of his war; "good soldiers," with sword in one hand and shield in the other; "workmen needing not to be ashamed" of the work they do, or of the way in which they do it. "*With both hands!*"

IV.

There is yet, however, a higher stage of obedience, the highest of all, which is expressed by *all* the words of the text, "*with both hands* EARNESTLY." It is not enough that all the talents are laid out; they must all be laid out to the best advantage. It is not enough

that every power and passion shall be enlisted in the Lord's service; they must all be baptised, inspired, and energized with a Christian earnestness. Thought must be suffused with feeling, and work must be filled and vitalized with love. This is the baptism of Pentecost. This is the highest power of the gospel. This is the sign and fruit of the indwelling of the Holy Ghost. And this is just *the* thing which some men need to make them happy, heroic, successful, victorious. For there are those who work "*with both hands*," who keep nothing back. There is no conflict of principles in their souls, and no visible flaw in their obedience. There is nothing you could name and point to as wrong in their life. A principle of conscientiousness rules over all. And yet there is lacking the full glow of life. The mechanism is perfect; the action of it is very steady; but that is just the thing—it is *mechanical*, rather than *vital* action. Considering the life of such a person as a machine, you would not need to add axis, or crank, or wheel, or leverage any where; all that is wanting is motive power—*i.e.*, increase of earnestness. Considering the heart of such a person as an altar, you do not need to kindle the fire. It is burning; only too slowly. You require only to bring fuel to increase the flame, and fresher air to fan and feed it. "*With both hands earnestly.*"

The Christian earnestness is not mere vehemence

and heat. It is essential that it be informed with full intelligence—"*zeal according to knowledge.*" The difference between fanaticism and zeal is chiefly a difference in knowledge. All beneficent energies are actuated by truth.

Christian earnestness is wise and thoughtful in the application of knowledge, in the judgment of persons events, times, and seasons; and while it seeks its ends with great steadiness, it does not rush on them blindly at all risks.

Christian earnestness is very patient. While working all its forces it learns to wait. It suffers disappointment, and labours on. It sees the expected harvest fail, and begins to sow again. Jesus saw all men, his very disciples, go away from him, and yet went up to Calvary to die. In one word, Christian earnestness is a reproduction in our hearts of the tender and undying compassion of the heart of Christ. It is Christ living on in us, and working on for man's salvation. He who objects to a full-hearted earnestness must object to Jesus Christ, and to the plan of redemption by him, and to the lives of the apostles, and to the constancy of the martyrs, and to the songs of the angels, and to all the gladness and glory of heaven.

How many reasons might be urged for an earnest life I cannot tell. I will give you some.

Self-preservation requires it. We cannot keep our

spiritual faculties and senses clear and bright without use. The rust of moral decay will be within us to a greater or less extent if it is not the habit of our life to do whatsoever our hand findeth to do "*with our might*," "with both hands earnestly." And to think of rust and loss in things so precious! Why, if we felt aright, we should feel as if a thousand fortunes were going from us in the loss or decay of spiritual capacities and endowments.

Honesty requires it. We have undertaken a great service—if at all—on certain terms, clear conditions laid down by the master and accepted by us. We must fulfil them, or we are not living fairly. There may not be a stain on our character or a flaw in one transaction of our earthly life, but, in the highest sense, we are not perfectly honest men if we are hiding our Lord's money —if we are not living and working "with both hands earnestly."

Benevolence requires it. We love our fellow-men—friends and neighbours, kinsmen and countrymen. Now, the one thing we can do for them above and before all other things in value is, to live truly and intensely before them—working "with both hands earnestly."

Gratitude requires it. This is *all* we can do for Christ. We cannot pay him for his "strong crying and tears," for his "agony and bloody sweat," in any way but this. He will take nothing from us but this—no

property, no penance, nothing but the loving toils of a loving life, wrought "with both hands earnestly."

Time requires it. There is not one among us who would wish to go out of the world without having lived for some time in this way in it. But when is that time to be? Next year? Who can tell you whether you will not be far beyond all dates and times and seasons ere next year? To-morrow, even, is unknown; and because it is unknown and carries its secrets undisclosed, it is our victor if we do not meet it with a loving heart. We are not fully matched with the very day that is in flight over our head, if we are not working "with both hands earnestly."

And to give you but one reason more—the text requires it. For I remind you that this text is one taken from the enemy. We have seized it as from the devil. It describes *his* host, his dark and serried ranks, his black and busy workers. There they stand before us in full and horrid equipment, by their very attitude and manner throwing out a challenge to us of the opposite army. We thank them for the attitude. We accept the challenge. We are no soldiers unless we do. Yes, brethren, the question is, Are they to be matched and met? or is the field to be left to them, while we retire into entrenchments? No one who observes can doubt that the question is pushed to this issue. There is no form of evil that assumes much disguise or reserve,

while some forms of it stand out like Satan to the sight. The Scriptures are explained away with learning, and scorned in pride. Darts are shot at the very cross. Ridicule is heaped upon the saints. God is made helpless under the power of his own laws; and immortality is swallowed up of a *more* immortal death. Meanwhile, the lighter throng, under cover of these intellectual protections, rush through the courses of pleasure, and dance or rage in the wild delirium of sin before our eyes. They know, if we do not, that the question is, "Who shall have the world?" With both hands earnestly they protest, "It is ours." With both hands earnestly we signify, "It is not; it belongs to our Master, who made it, who redeemed it, and who is ruling it on to its day of full redemption. We must have it all for him soon or late. Overturn, overturn, overturn till he comes whose right it is, and takes his kingdom!" *So* we meet them; and in no other way but this *can* they be met. Not by scholarship, not in fine reasoning, not in bold language. In those respects they have their champions, like Goliath of Gath, who come out and defy the armies of Israel. But there is not a stripling in all our hosts who, if he be rightly-minded, need therefore decline the contest. Let him go forth as he is, and do what he can "with both hands earnestly." On that simple but high ground of vantage—by his faith and love and prayer—he is match, and more, in his part

of the field, and for his own work, for tried warriors and chief men. "Gird thy sword upon thy thigh, O most mighty, with thy glory and thy majesty. In thy majesty ride prosperously, because of truth and meekness and righteousness, and thy right hand shall teach thee terrible things. Thine arrows are sharp in the heart of the king's enemies, whereby the people fall under thee." Let them fall, broken and bleeding, but submissive at last, *into* thy kingdom. Let the people praise thee, O Christ. Let all the people praise thee. Let the angels come soon and sing at thy final triumph as they sang at thy birth, "Glory to God in the highest, peace on earth, and good will among men."

Bearing one another's Burdens.

Bear ye one another's burdens, and so fulfil the law of Christ.—
GALATIANS vi. 2.

THIS world is full of burden-bearers. The man has yet to be born who shall pass through it without taking a load. There are some men who seem as if they would. They say, "get ready the chariot, prepare the wings; we mean to roll through life in ease; we mean to soar above its cares." But the wheels of the chariot go heavily. The flight is never far. The invisible burden gathers, and they are surprised to find themselves among the weary and the heavy laden who need rest.

Not only is the bearing of burdens the common lot, but there is a sense in which the injunction of the text is universally fulfilled. We do, naturally and inevitably, bear one another's burdens. "No man liveth to himself." No man can. Each gives and takes continually, helps or hinders those around according to his own life. And life is such that every man must take some share of the life of those around. To be in relationships means this. To be in a family as head or member, to be in business, to be one of a social and civilized com-

munity implies this. We do bear one another's burdens, and the share of some men is very heavy. Then, what need is there of the text? The text is needed to make that Christian which is simply natural. It is needed to change hard necessity into holy duty. It is needed to multiply the instances in which it can be fulfilled. One of the peculiar excellences of Christianity is this, that it takes what is good, or what is existing in human life by necessity, and raises it into *religion*. It adopts certain natural sentiments, and puts them into their right place in the system of truth. It consecrates certain natural virtues by furnishing right motives and worthy ends. Viewed in this light, how pleasant is the text? It speaks to men who are all struggling and suffering together, and says not, "throw off the burden, deny the mutual claim, restrain the hand of help;" but it says, "what you must do, do willingly. What you might leave undone, do more willingly still." "Bear ye one another's burdens, and so fulfil the law of Christ."

I shall speak now of some of the burdens which we may help our Christian neighbours and our fellow-men to bear; and then, much more briefly, of the motives and inducements to such a course.

I.

Poverty is a burden which we may lighten. It cannot be reasonably questioned that poverty is a great

disadvantage, and constitutes a great pressure on the poor. It may be said, "many of the poor are born poor. They do not *feel* the privations so much as you, looking down upon their state, might imagine. They are strangers to the tastes of luxury. They have never had the pleasant sensations of competence. They live among straits. Their whole life is a struggle." This is partly true; but then we have to think, if we think justly and Christianly, not of their actual state only, but of their *possible* state; not only of what is, but of what *might* be. The poorest man is a man altogether, and is capable of all that a man can be in soul and in circumstances. The most perfect man is only a specimen of what the most imperfect man might be. "But there must be the different classes in society. Our Lord tells us that we shall *always* have the poor with us?" Our Lord, as we take it, refers simply to a fact. Surely he does not announce poverty as a perpetual institution for this world—as one of *the laws* of his kingdom. That kingdom is of such a nature that in proportion as its principles prevail, they must bring all evil things to an end. Now poverty, if not morally an evil thing in itself, has in very many cases a constant pressure that way. It does drive men on to thoughts and states of mind, and acts and habits, which *are* evil. It prevents the acquisition of knowledge. It makes decency very difficult. It quenches the nobler strivings. It wears the body with toil, withholds the sustenance of

strength. It makes life a drudgery. When very deep it is twin-sister to famine, and behind them both are the darker forms of crime. "*Lest I be poor and steal,*" is the argument by which the wise man's prayer, "Give me *not* poverty," is sustained.

No thoughtful loving man can say that *that* is a state in which men ought to be content, or in which we ought to be content to see them. It is a great burden, and we are to bear it, with them, and for them. The manner of doing this is a large question, on which no very specific instruction can be given. In those cases, where the poverty is not providential, and for the time necessary, but voluntary and vicious, pecuniary help, indiscriminate relief, would not be the bearing of the burden, rather it would be making it heavier. Or if *indolence* were the cause, then a stimulus to industry would be the relief. Or if wrong laws or mistaken social arrangements were producing it, the correction and amendment of these would be the cure. But, in any case, the bearing of the burden never can consist in mere moralizing—in looking at them, preaching to them about their duties and their proper place in the social scale, giving them a little charity and some wise advice. If we are to bear the burden, we must *take* it in some way so that they shall feel we are taking it. We must go and stand by them and with them. We must give something, feel something, do something, and be something,

in relation to them and their straits, which will be sympathetic and helpful. And the obligation to this course is the stronger, because there is another obligation, all but constant and universal in its force, to decline and resist the solicitations of a clamorous mendicancy which meet you on every side. If you are wise, and thoughtfully merciful, you send the beggars from your gates, and refuse them on the street, when they assail you with their piteous whine. One is sorry, indeed, to think it, but to those who have examined the subject, the evidence is irresistible, that work is their abhorrence, and that begging is their trade. And yet it is no easy thing to justify to one's own feelings a uniform refusal. Tenderness flows; benevolence pleads; the eye affects the heart. "It would hardly be safe to one's own moral health to decline in every case." But how much will this unpleasant, and to some even dangerous duty, be sweetened and made wholesome, by the blessed habit of seeking out the poverty that is to be relieved, by the habit of "considering the poor" in all their feelings and in all their circumstances, so as to make the relief given really honourable and pleasant. If you are in the habit of looking lovingly around the circle of relationship, and with brotherly-kindness among the poor of the church, and into the neighbourhood where you live, and into the darker parts of our social economy, in order that you may cheerfully and immediately *do* what your means

and your gifts allow, for the help of the poor and for the destruction of poverty, then you will find little or no difficulty, and you will incur no moral danger, in resisting the importunities of the undeserving. "Bear ye one another's burdens, and so fulfil the law of Christ."

II.

Infirmity is a burden. In the previous verse the apostle supposes infirmity to have prevailed, and to have issued in a "fault." And he exhorts those who were spiritual among them, to "restore such an one in the spirit of meekness"—which is just saying, "go bear the burden of that infirmity with him." Now our life—our social life, and even our Christian life, abounds with infirmities which are always issuing in "*faults*." It has been said, and no doubt it is true, that every man has his besetting sins, and every man his characteristic "*faults*." This is only to say that human nature is not at present sanctified equally in all its parts. The leaven is long in reaching some parts of the nature. "The city of God lieth foursquare"—is equally strong and protected on all sides. It is not so as yet with a human soul. There is always one side less protected than any other. And the devil, when coming to the man, will come on that side. And the evil that is in the man, will go out on that side to meet the devil, and to make an open door for him to come in. The infirmity with one may

be pride, and the fault, contempt of the poor; with another self-will, and the fault, infraction of others' rights; with another the love of pleasure, issuing in faults of sensual excess; with another it may be an untruthful habit of the mind coming out in evil speakings, and thoughtless yet very hurtful exaggerations or extenuations of things that happen. The list of human infirmities is a very long one, the category of *faults* does not soon come to an end. Now, taking the more evident among them, how are we to deal with them? This passage tells us clearly. Whenever restoration is possible, we are to "restore" in the spirit of meekness. If a man shall fall in any measure from integrity, or from charity, or from truthfulness of speech, or from purity of behaviour—restore such an one in the spirit of meekness. Bear his burden until you bear it away, and it is his burden no longer. Go to him on the side of his infirmity, not to reproach and accuse, but to heal and help.

If a man is *fundamentally* wrong indeed, if you have reason to suspect that he has not truth in the inward parts, and that what he calls, or what may by others be called his infirmity, is in fact his course of settled and voluntary action, that he *chooses* to be on the side of evil, *then* you cannot be on his side, you cannot bear *that* burden; you ought not to try. "Come out of her my people, that ye be not partakers of her sins, and that ye receive not of her plagues!" We are always taught

in the Scriptures to distinguish between weak goodness and wilful sin, between endeavours faithfully made, although sometimes ineffectual, and contentment with evil, which leads to no true endeavour at all; and to distinguish also between *persons*—one it may be striving much to rise into openness, sincerity, and truth, into rectitude, and wisdom, and love, but who stumbles and sometimes falls in his endeavours; and another, who wears for convenience the superficial virtues, and has no idea of the true goodness at all, and no eye upon the mark. Now it often happens, through our want of that ready sympathy with goodness in all its phases and in all its fortunes, which is commended to us in the text—that we treat the superficial as if they were sincere, and the sincere as if they were superficial. We say, "Well done!" to him who never struggles; we say, "Ah, you are down!" to him who, in struggling, falls. What a surprising revelation it would be if Jesus were to come among us again, and point out the persons who are trying to keep his laws and to live in him, but who, weak in the faith, need help and succour! But what do we say? Jesus *is* among us, and the more we have of his faithful but tender and loving spirit, the more easy and the more pleasant it will be for us to discover and to help those who are weak but yet sincere. And then we shall do well to remember that weakness and strength are but relative terms, and that the strongest among us

is weak when compared with the holiest of God's saints. "Bear ye *one another's* burdens." The apostle does not mention any among them who would have none of his own—and who could devote all his strength to the bearing of the burdens of others. Each one, as we said before, has his infirmities and his faults. They are in every society, in every house, in every man; and the injunction is, that each shall be willing and ready to bear those of others around; and that each shall be aware, that others are finding it needful to bear with his. Thus the Christian service is laid upon us in our home walks —in our most private life. None can justly say, "I have no sphere—there is no service of Christ for me." You can bear burdens. You can suffer the hasty word to pass in silence, without answering again. You can check the ungenerous judgment in your heart. You can watch for the best opportunity of suggesting a more excellent way. You can comfort the sorrowful spirit. You can say, "try again." You can speak a word of approval to one who needs it much, and who hardly ever gets it. You can say, "that was very thoughtful of you." You can make confession of your own faults. You can say—you ought to be able to say, unless you are thinking far more highly of yourself than you ought to think —"I wonder how people bear with me!" You can remember our Lord's words to Peter, "I say not unto thee, until seven times, but until seventy times seven"—*i. e.*,

a number quite indefinite—thou shalt forgive thy brother, and thy brother shall forgive thee—each, however, remembering that "*restoration*" to whatever has been lost is to be sought; and advancement onwards from all present attainments, to higher and better—"to the mark of the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus."

III.

I shall mention only one burden more which we may bear for each other—and that is, *the burden of trouble.* All that we understand by trouble may be borne more or less by one for another. If it be true that "we have a fellowship with hearts to keep and cultivate," it will be found that that fellowship can be kept in times of trouble as fully and as sacredly as at other times, in *some senses* more tenderly then, than at *any* time besides. We can "rejoice with them that do rejoice;" but if that were all, our fellowship would only be a one-sided thing. But we can also "weep with them that weep," and that is a ministration of love far more intense. Souls come nearer each other in sorrow than in joy; and a friendship or a fellowship cemented by sorrow is often both more profitable and more lasting than the fellowship of health and laughter and mutual success. If two men meet, and go for days along the same journey, looking at the scenery and passing through the adventures of the time together,

they will part with pleasant feelings, and with memories which it will always be pleasant to retain. But if the acquaintance is made in another way—if one finds the other overtaken with a sudden illness, and stays with him by the way, watching through the night by his fevered bed, and ministering to his need until he is able to rise and walk—*that* will be a friendship for life, at least in the heart of the man whose burden of trouble was borne for him with a sympathy so true.

Let us take a far higher example. Jesus could have come down from heaven in another way than he did. He could have come in light and song, attended by shining angels, and the heavenly "harpers harping with their harps." And perhaps, for a little season, the misery and the sorrow of the earth might have been stilled—the prisoner looking out of the bars of his dungeon to see the sheen of the passing glory—the sick lifting his weary head to gaze—the blind wondering what it would be to *see* so grand a spectacle. But would not the world in such a case, after the stir of the triumph was over, have sunk back into its misery and darkness, with a moan of deeper anguish, and as under the shadows of now fulfilled despair. *He* never could have come to this world so. He did come in *flesh*, in poverty, in homelessness, with tears, with shudderings of nameless agony, that he might drink up our sorrow in the vastness of his own, and that he might open

springs of everlasting consolation to all the children of trouble. "Forasmuch, then, as Christ hath suffered for us in the flesh, arm yourselves likewise with the same mind." Suffer for others as he did for you. "Bear ye one another's burdens, and so fulfil the law of Christ!"

Here, as in the former cases, there is room, and indeed urgent call, for wisdom, thoughtfulness, ingenuity, in the *expression* of the sympathy. The best way of bearing the burden the bearer of it must find out. It will not do always to give tear for tear and sigh for sigh. Sometimes the smile, the cheerful word, the sunny view of life, will be the truest sympathy. And sometimes a quietness as deep as that of Job's friends, when they sat down with him seven days, and spoke not a word, because they saw that his grief was great. Always, however, if we are to bear the burden well, we must really enter with our thought and heart *into the case*—we must for the time be ourselves the sufferers. "*Sympathy!*" We are always using the word; but do we know what it means? It means "suffering with." Nothing less. We have no right to profess sympathy unless we feel ourselves in a measure "suffering with" those whom we pity and wish to help. There may be suitable phraseology, and liberal gifts, and personal effort, without very much sympathy. While, on the other hand, it is right to observe that these are its most

natural expressions. But in the haste of this life, or when allured towards the realms of pleasure, men are apt to fling out the *expressions* of sympathy as the duty of the moment, and to forget how much more precious and helpful, at least in many cases, is *the thing itself.* If you wish to help some troubled soul, if you wish to make some fellow-sufferer think of Jesus Christ, you will do it in no way so readily and effectually as by sympathy—by filling your heart with the trouble you would lessen. This is "Christ in you," and is probably the presage of Christ in your suffering friend, with increase of soul-strength, and abundance of consolation. If every Christian man would put himself, according to the measure of his ability, in sympathy with all the trouble of his friends, what a lightening of that trouble there would be, what a dropping away of burdens, and what a glory cast around the afflictions that remain! It would be as if the Saviour were personally present in ten thousand homes. There is perhaps nothing in which we are more deficient than in due readiness and fulness of Christian sympathy. Alas! how far from *him* in this! How far from our better self! How far from the possible man is the actual! For we *might* drink of his cup, and be baptised with his baptism, so that every sorrow would soften at our touch, and every mourner be glad at our coming. The Lord enable us, in our poor finite measure, to be men of sorrows and acquainted with

grief! to bear one another's burdens, and so fulfil the law of Christ.

A word or two now, in conclusion, on the motives or inducements by which this exhortation may be supported. Of the many that might be named I shall mention only two, deriving them both from the present passage.

From the first verse we have this motive—"*Considering thyself.*" That is a very touching appeal, founded on the frailty of human nature, and the uncertainties of human life. Everything adverse seems to sink before it—selfishness in shame, self-reliance in fear. Like God's lightning it melts with a touch the heart that is true and susceptible. "Considering thyself." *You* may be poor; you may be in fault; you may be in trouble. There may be a great reverse in your circumstances coming on; there may be a great trial of your principles at hand; there may be a sad trouble in store for you. If it should be so, you may hope by divine help to get well through all that comes to you in divine providence. But you will go through such transitions and experiences very much more easily, if by sympathy you have been in the states before. Suppose the morning come, when, writing to a confidential friend, you say, "I am now a poor man." But suppose you are able to think, after you have written that sentence: "This is not the

first of my poverty. In spirit I have been with the poor nearly all my life, and more tenderly since I knew the dear master who was homeless once; the condition is hard, but it is not harsh to me, as it is to many; I know how to bear its pressure, and where to find its sweetness." Suppose the hour of temptation come, and that, conscious as you have never been before, of the moral infirmity of your nature, you exclaim, "Now I am tested indeed! but long before now I have put myself in the place of tested men. I have trembled with them in their trials, and never scorned or neglected them in their falls: Now, may the good Lord send some 'succourer of many' to me also, or stay me with his own hand until this hour is through." Suppose the day of dark affliction brooding over heart and home; but suppose you can say, in the sad talkings of your heart, "This, too, is not quite a strange thing. I have tried for years to comfort the distressed; many a time putting out the hand of sympathy to still, if I might, the tremblings of the sufferer, and now I am comforted myself with the same comforts wherewith I sought to comfort others." "Considering thyself." Consider thus what may be coming, what you may need, and how you may receive what you need with tears of joy and thankfulness, as, under grace, the moral and providential result of bearing the burdens of others now.

The second motive stands more immediately in the text—"*And so fulfil the law of Christ.*" If the other motive was tender, this is noble. If the other was humanly persuasive, this is divinely inspiring. "The law of Christ—the law which he gave; the law which he kept; the law of his birth, and life, and cross, and passion; the law of his eternal kingdom—that law, on the whole human side of it, will be "fulfilled," by obedience to the injunction of the text. We thus see that the law of sympathy is a branch of the universal law of love. Rather it is for this world the stem and body of that law. Christ requires of us nothing higher, nothing more. In requiring this, he contemplates our own infinite advancement and happiness, the fulfilment of every prophecy of our nature, and the rich, and full, and eternal attainment of the great purpose of God. This law of Christ, viewed thus as a law of fulfilment, how simple yet how grand is it! To fulfil this law is to fulfil *all* laws. It is "more than all whole burnt-offerings and sacrifices," more than all ceremonial and observance, more than all philosophy, more than all morality, more than all religion besides. The keeping of it is the completeness of duty, the substance of goodness, the secret of happiness, and the best preparation for the ineffable glories and joys of heaven. "Bear ye one another's burdens, and *so* fulfil the law of Christ."

Every Man Bearing his own Burden.

For every man shall bear his own burden.—GALATIANS vi. 5.
Cast thy burden upon the Lord, and he shall sustain thee.—PSALM lv. 22.

UNDER the former text we considered some of the burdens which men bear, and which can be lightened for them by others—burdens which we bear mutually. But the apostle reminds us in this verse that there are some burdens which cannot be shared, which each must bear for himself alone.

Some think, indeed, that the apostle is here still commending the exhortation of the second verse, and that he is now suggesting to them, as an additional inducement to mutual helpfulness in times of need, the consideration that each needs help himself, that each has a burden of his own, which another may help him to bear, that each has his own weaknesses, infirmities, and sins, and therefore that each needs that from others, which the apostle asks him (in the former text) to give *to* others in their necessity.

It requires one to wrestle with the language to make this meaning out of it. And it is only a narrowing of

the meaning when it *is* made out. 'Tis only blotting out one text that another may live. Let them both live. They are both true, just as they stand before us. We can, blessed be Christ who has taught us, bear one another's burdens, and so fulfil his law. And there *are* burdens which each man must bear for himself alone.

I.

The burden of Personality can be borne only by the man himself. That is "*his own burden.*" Of course this truth is surrounded and connected with other truths, which limit and qualify it, and put it into harmonious relationship with God and man. We belong to *the human race;* we are "made of one blood for to dwell on the face of the earth." The first man, as the Bible tells us, as the whole Christian religion implies, represented all his successors. The race fell in Adam. The race rises in Christ. Parents have great power over children; the children seem almost a part of themselves. The family is in a sense an organic whole. And, in short, each individual is open to manifold influence—may be impressed, drawn, turned, melted, inflamed, according to the powers that play on him. But he is *himself* in all. No part of his being is drawn away from him, however sensibly and powerfully its relations may be affected. He receives no essential part of the being of others into his own. He

abides in the eye of God a separate, complete, individual soul for ever. "Every man shall bear his own burden."

A man often ceases to feel it for a while. He mingles in some great and gay assemblage, and for the time feels as though his personality were gone, or in suspense. He is not as a separate drop, he is lost in an ocean of life. But in a little while the great assemblage melts all away—only the individuals are left; that which they constituted when they were together has gone for ever; and the man whose life seemed to be almost absorbed and lost in an ocean of multitudinous existence —where is he now? He is going home there pensively under the shadow of the trees, and deeply conscious of himself; with his own joys and sorrows, with his own thoughts and plans, with his soul in all its powers and affections untouched. He is bearing his own burden.

Or, in a time of sorrow, other souls come around with watchful yearning love. He has letters breathing the intensest sympathy. He has visits of sincere and sorrowing affection, or he has in the house with him those who feel so deeply and truly with himself that they hardly seem to be divided in the grief. But, the letters are read, the visits are paid, the tears are shed and then —he retires into his personality, and feels that his sorrow is his own, that none can tell the loss to him, that none *can* feel as he feels, that he possesses his sorrow

because he possesses his soul, and that he, as "every man, shall bear his own burden."

A man is born alone—has his being moulded with God's plastic hand, has all its powers implanted, and the awful image of God impressed, to be carried in glory or in ruin for ever. In all the stages really, and in all the critical and important times of his life consciously, he is alone, as distinct as a tree in the forest, separate as a star in the sky. And in death he leaveth all his friends, and goeth out along the darksome valley without a hand to help, without a voice to cheer—when the dying really comes. He goeth out bearing his own burden of life from one world into another—from the things which are seen to the things which are not seen, from those which are temporal to those which are eternal.

II.

The burden of Responsibility is borne always by the individual man. The responsibility arises of necessity out of the personality. Because the personality holds in it the elements of moral life. Man is moral, and therefore responsible.

No doubt responsibility may be greatly diffused. A nation, for instance, has national existence, and the responsibility of its national acts must be shared, and the consequences of these acts enjoyed or suffered by the people. So, too, we sometimes hear of a *joint responsi-*

bility—i.e., two or more persons agree to act together in a certain capacity, and to be mutually accountable for all that is done. But the most complete responsibility is always the personal. There could be gathered up out of all these diffused responsibilities that measure which belongs to each individual. God, the all-knowing, *could* make each man of the most populous nation stand in his own accountability before him. He not only could; he does. What says the apostle? "So then every one of us shall give account of *himself* to God." We live in the mass, but we are judged one by one. We act and interact, give and take, all day long, and our whole life through. But each, at every moment, stands responsibly before God, and to each God says, as he did to Daniel, "*Thou* shalt stand in *thy* lot at the end of the days." The king has gone into the far country to receive for himself a kingdom, and to return. "Occupy till I come," was his last injunction. *When* he comes he will command these servants to be called unto him to whom he has given money, that he may know how much—has been gained on the whole, and say to all, without distinction, "well done?" No. But that he may know "how much *every man* has gained by trading." Each appears alone—bearing his own burden, and all through the judgment it is "*Thou*." "*Thou* good servant!" "Thou wicked and slothful servant." "Take from *him* the pound." "Give it to *him* that hath ten." "To *every one*

that hath shall be given, and he shall have more abundance." "*From him* that hath not shall be taken away even that he hath." "Every man shall bear his own burden."

III.

Every man shall bear his own burden of Guilt.—Accountability supposes, of course, a ruler or judge to *whom* we are responsible. The judge will not only form an opinion, but pronounce a judgment, and the judgment pronounced can only be of one kind, or of another—can only be "right" or "wrong," "innocent" or "guilty." And guilt cannot be transferred from one to another—at least among men. One man cannot take *any* share of another man's guilt. He may take a part of the consequences of that guilt. He may go and stand beside the fallen one and say, "let the stroke be on me, let the disgrace darken on me, let the penalties come upon me!" And in the judgments of men it might be arranged so. But all the powers on earth could not make a guilty man innocent, or an innocent man guilty.—No; nor all the powers of heaven. The soul that sinneth, *it* shall suffer; where guilt gathers, there the guilt must rest until God shall remove it. "Every man shall bear his own burden." And, oh, what a load is this! a load of guilt resting on the soul continually. 'Tis this which turns the moisture into the drought of summer. 'Tis this which seems like the very "hand of God heavy day and night." 'Tis this

which breaketh the bones, which drinketh up the spirit, which weakeneth strength by the way, which quencheth the light of hope, and which cleaveth and clingeth to the soul a burden of present judgment, a daily foretelling of doom. Full well may the Saviour say, "Come unto me ye that *labour* and are *heavy laden*, and I will give you rest." Oh the labour! oh the heavy load! Such labour there is not beneath the sun as this—the labour of trying to carry (as if it were nothing, a mere feather's-weight, or a handful of flowers) that weight of sin which must break down the soul at last if it is not taken off. "The spirit of a man will sustain his infirmity," a man may meet and vanquish a thousand things which are adverse and trying—pain, weakness, loss, sorrow, scorn, death itself—all these may be sustained and overcome by "the spirit of a man." But a wounded spirit—a spirit wounded deeply by sin and not healed by grace—"who can bear?" Yet a man *must* bear it. It is his own burden, and if he does not avail himself of the means of deliverance righteously and graciously provided, it will be his burden for evermore.

IV.

Immortality is a man's own burden.—Each is to live for ever. There may be more or less of company, or one may be in company and another in comparative solitude, but each must live his own life, and carry forward with

him through the periods of eternal duration its accumulating elements of happiness or woe. And not for one brief hour in all those eternal periods shall one be able to exchange life with another, so as to look back on any line but the line of his own history—or forward into any futurity, which will not be filled with his own history still. "O king, live for ever!" said the satraps and servitors of the eastern monarchs, in a spirit of boundless adulation and flattery. But if they had addressed their immortal part this would have been only the language of truth. Before any soul a man might stand and say, "*O king, live for ever*," crowned and robed amid the glories of the eternal kingdom; or *dis*-crowned and in disgrace, a wreck of life yet living on; for "every man shall bear his own burden" of immortality for ever.

Such, then, are some of the senses in which the text is true. In regard to personality, responsibility, guilt, and immortality, every man shall bear his own burden. And if a man would sit down calmly and look at these things, and add one to another, and try to weigh the whole, he would see *what* a burden he has to bear!

There is little encouragement given to such thinking by the times in which we live, and less than a little in the great cities of the land. There is perhaps more thinking in the world than there ever was before; but there is not thoughtfulness in proportion to the

thinking. Men are living less and less alone. They are taking counsel increasingly how to *come together*. Science to-day, the arts to-morrow; now the flowers, now the music. Splendid hospitalities and midnight revels, and assemblages of the great and the gay! And in all the *multitudinist* principle! Men must be together in *great companies*. The pleasure and the triumph would be nothing without that. It is not that *I* shall go at some quiet time (when the thing I profess to be going to do can be done). *I* shall go and look at the blooming flowers, every one of them a sweet work of God and a prophecy of heaven; or at the breathing statue, reminding one of the perfection of Eden, and pointing to the higher perfection of the resurrection-day; or at the glowing picture in which hill and valley seem to shine in a living light. No, I must be in the mode; I must be there at the right time. I make tryst with society. I? I don't wish to think of I in the deep and true sense. I wish to sink the "*I*" in the "*We*." Yes; but you cannot. The text tells you that you cannot. It tells you that "the pomp and the glory and the multitude" are nothing—that the man is all. Every show will vanish, and every assemblage will break up, but *no man* will die. It tells us in other words that all that is in the world: "the lust cf the flesh"—your splendid feasts and carnal enjoyments; "the lust of the eyes"—your pleasant pictures, noble buildings, charming prospects,

fine estates; "and the pride of life"—the badges of honour, the signs of power, the glittering show of wealth;—that all these are not of the Father, but are of the world, and the world passeth away, and the lust thereof. And *He!—He!* what becomes of the multitudinist principle now? "He that doeth the will of God abideth for ever!"

Now we must think of this if we wish to be faithful and true men. It may be to some the taking up of the cross; but it must be done. "Let a man examine himself." "Commune with your own heart upon your bed, and be still." Let a man then sit down to weigh his burden and think: "I am one—personal, complete. I cannot mingle my being in a general tide. I cannot lose one atom of my personality. I must be *myself* for ever!"

I am responsible—having faculty and feeling, power of choice, and liberty of action, I am responsible. Having these things, I am a moral being, and I am responsible. I must give account of myself to God.

I am guilty. Why should I keep up the vain pretence of innocence? Why should I seek to justify myself when mine own clothes abhor me, when I have been plunged in the ditch of sin and shame, and all the snow-water of Lebanon would not wash me clean? My mouth must be stopped, for I am in and of a world which is guilty before God.

I am immortal. I am living for evermore, with

personality, with responsibility, with guilt, I am living for ever. And *where* to live? and *how?*

Perhaps you say that this train of reflection becomes not only very solemn, but really quite painful. Yes; it does. It does if it is pursued deeply and truthfully. And one object we have at present in view is to induce a course of thought that shall end in pain—deep, anxious pain.

Ah! we are so infected with the spirit of pleasure that we carry it with us everywhere—on through our Sabbath days, and into our most religious acts. And pain? that is a thing which is to be endured if it *must* come, but which certainly we are to avoid by every means in our power. Few mistakes are greater than this, and few mistakes produce worse fruit. This doctrine of universal pleasantness makes us ministers superficial in our preaching, and you Christians weak in your lives. It tampers with truth. It reveals or hides duty according to the weather; puts expediency in the place of rectitude; and makes heaven a sensual paradise. Was the descent of the Son of God from yonder heights into this nether darkness pleasant? Was the crown of thorns pleasant, and the lonely garden, and the sore amazement, and the swimming agony, and the bitter cross? Pleasant indeed, beyond expression, were the fruits of all these things. There was *a joy* set before him in all. And so there is be-

fore us. But never can we have fellowship of the joy without fellowship of the suffering. We must be crucified if we are to live. "Blessed are they that mourn, for they shall be comforted." Do you say, "How is the comfort to come in this case?" There seems no escape. For a man pursuing such a train of reflection there seems no escape. The burden is *his*, and it is a burden too heavy to bear. He cannot bear it, and yet he must, and yet he cannot. No; he cannot. Then let him cast his burden upon the Lord, and he shall sustain, not *it*, but him—not the burden, but *the man*. This second text fits the case exactly. He will not carry away the burden. He cannot. He can take some burdens away entirely, but not these. He cannot divest a man of his personality. He cannot make a man irresponsible. He cannot say to a guilty man, You never sinned; and he will not quench the flame of immortality in any soul.

But he can come *so* near that he shall be related to your personality in a close, sustaining, living way. A man cannot touch the identity of a man. A creature cannot enhance or impair the being of a creature. But the Lord in his almighty love can associate your personality inseparably with his own. He can constitute a mystical oneness, which time, nor change, nor death, can destroy. He can live in you, and bring you to live in him, and then say, "Abide in me and I in you."

"Because I live ye shall live also. Cast thy burden, then, on the Lord, and *he* shall sustain thee."

He cannot make you irresponsible, and he would not if he could. Irresponsible! No. When he changes lions into toads, and eagles into crawling reptiles, he will make a man irresponsible. But he can make righteousness so grand in the man's esteem, and love so fair in his eyes, and the desire to possess them so pure and vehement in his heart; he can so ennoble duty and self-sacrifice, and so exalt this whole life-conflict—that you will be glad every day that he ever called you into such a life, and gifted you with such powers. Cast thy burden of responsibility on the Lord, and he shall sustain thee.

He cannot say to you, "You have never sinned," nor make you feel as if you never had. Through all eternity you will never forget that you have been a sinner. But he can *forgive* your transgression, and *cover* your sin. He can remove the *consequences* of your guilt, and blot out its stains, and break its power; and, "as far as the east is from the west, so far can he remove your transgressions from you." Where your sin has abounded he can make his grace much more abound. He was made sin for us that we might be made the righteousness of God in him. Cast thy burden of guilt on the Lord, and he shall sustain thee.

And, finally, although he will never darken through

eternal ages the essential light of your spirit, but keep its flame in a steady glow of existence, he can translate you out of a world of shadows up to the land of lights, where life will be a joy, where glory will beam through the common air, where his image will shine full and bright from every soul, where his blessedness will diffuse itself through all hearts, and where men and angels shall walk together in the league of recovered fellowship, and be filled together with all the fulness of God. Cast thy burden of eternal life upon the Lord, and he shall sustain thee.

You see why Christ, the eternal Son of God, became incarnate—why God was manifest in the flesh. He saw that we were separated from one another by our sin—that each man was bearing his own burden, and staggering on to ruin beneath the load. He saw that we were all separated from him, and that it was not competent for his omnipotence to render us help unless it wrought by means of humiliation and suffering and death. Therefore "he made himself of no reputation, took upon him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of man; and being found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross." All this vast descent was accomplished in order that he might stand by our side, our almighty loving helper. And now we can lean on him, "the friend that sticketh closer than a

brother;" and bear all our burdens, and yet walk with elastic step; and take his yoke upon us too, and find it to be easy; his burden, and prove it light.

You see also on what a broad foundation the promise rests—"*He shall sustain you.*" Not to sustain a trusting soul, however burdened, would be to renounce his very incarnation, to deny a thousand promises, to mock men instead of saving them. "*He shall sustain thee.*" No load can ever come that will be too heavy for his strength. There may be some awful straits even in your earthly life, of which you yourself know nothing as yet, coming on. It is not likely; but suppose the worst. Suppose adversities as wild as the wintriest of weather. Suppose sorrow far darker than the shortest winter day. Suppose temptation shaking the soul as the wind shakes the trees or drives the waves before it. Suppose death coming to you (as he will come in some way to us all) robed in his blackest garb, and casting out his terrors like hail—you will be sustained. The Lord will sustain you. He cannot forget the promise. He cannot forget one who carries it in his heart. He would let the rivers freeze in their fountains, and all the flowers wither to their roots, and the light die out of every star, sooner than fail in the fulfilment of it. He shall sustain thee. His grace is sufficient for thee. Come, then, and cast your burden now on him. Lo,

he waits with outstretched hand, with longing heart, to receive you to your rest. Listen how he pleads with the strange, tender pleading of sorrow and love, with a pleading which has won home many a wanderer, and which may win you now at last to himself, —"Come unto me and I will give you rest."

Voices of the Spring.

Thou renewest the face of the earth.—PSALM civ. 30.

IT has been the habit of devout men in every age to trace God in his works—in the changes of the heavens, the revolutions of the seasons, and the ever-varying aspects of the earth. The writer of this psalm makes excursion in a spirit of attentive and appreciating piety through the whole earth, and along the courses of the visible universe. He sees God in all things and everywhere. This psalm is a very system of natural theology. It makes things high and low—the great and the little—plead for God. It would perhaps be to most of us a pleasant surprise to write out, and find by writing out, how many natural objects are mentioned in it; I am not going to name them all, but these are a few. "The heavens, the earth, the light, the darkness, the waters of the firmament, the chariot clouds, the winged winds, the thunder, the mountains, the hills, the rocks, the valleys, the springs and the running streams, the growing grass and the herb for food, the trees—cedar and fir—the birds' nests built in them, wine, oil, bread,

the sea, the ships." What a catalogue of objects! All speaking God's praise.

Also of living creatures there are not a few. "Creeping things, fowls of the heaven, beasts of the earth, cattle, conies, wild goats, young lions, leviathan, men, angels"—from the creeping things to the angels he goes up the ladder of life, and hears them all praising the name of the Lord.

The text has reference to the renewal of the earth in spring. We are now quite in the spring season again, approaching the height of it, and before its green flush of tenderness and promise passes way, we may surely, by the blessing of God, derive from it some good influences and some solid instruction.

Here, however, in the minds of some—those who live in cities—an objection may bar the way. "To us it can only be language. We cannot have the living influence of the season around us where we are. Every day we have only the streets and the crowds. We live amid the cares and toils and hastings of heart-fevered men. To speak to us about the spring is only to tantalize us, only to make us smile in carelessness, or to excite in us longings for what we cannot have."

There is no great force in that objection, because with very few is it *wholly* true. We have the signs of spring around us—not in any great affluence, but yet in number and beauty sufficient to tell us that God is

renewing the face of the earth. A flower in your little garden has the wisdom and beauty of God on it just as much as if it grew anywhere else. Let it be a type to you of *all* the flowers that are blooming; and the shrubs planted by your doors, and the trees of the neighbourhood—they are not like the trees of the forest, but their budding and leafing time is very beautiful nevertheless.

It is surprising if we observe how many colourings and waftings of the spring God sends into the city—far into it. The grass will grow in the heart of it, and some kinds of trees grow up to great strength and beauty there. And the birds! God sends the birds at this time to sing all round the city; some of them are not afraid to go to the very heart of it. I see men shooting them all through the winter, and snaring them all through the summer, and yet fresh flocks and troops of them come every year, to tell us that the winter is past, and "the time of the singing of birds is come." And then the light! that grows more beautiful every day, and brings out other beauties on the earth and in the sky. So that even *here* we may know, and rejoice in knowing, that God is "renewing the face of the earth."

Let us hear some of *the voices of the spring.*

I.

The first voice we hear *speaks directly for God*—for the divine existence and presence with us in his works

"The fool hath said in his heart, there is no God." Nature says in *her* heart, and in every colour and feature of her flushing face, "there *is* a God, and he is here!"

If any one shall say that all the beauty and abundance of the natural world is no proof to him that there is a God, and that a whole earth awakening into new life is just as little proof as the earth lying dead in winter, that in either case you have only "phenomena," and that his mind cannot rise above phenomena or look in any way beyond them, I do not know that you can reason to much effect with such a man. Nearly all you can say is just this, "My mind is not constituted as your mind. I *must* believe that these grand effects have a still grander cause; I must believe that a living spring is a voice from the living God."

For one man who can be satisfied with phenomena, there are probably ten thousand who must have something beyond and above to rest on. Every mind as yet unsophisticated, makes recognition (we do not say devout or grateful recognition, that depends on the moral condition—on the state of the heart—but recognition intellectually) by thought, by reason, by the quick action of what is felt to be a necessary principle of our nature, of God in his works. Which is nearer the truth? The philosopher, with his discursive eye and his microscopic observation, with his assembled facts and careful classification, who will tell you, "This is all I have:

I recognize nothing beyond what I can see or touch, or in some way test or analyze"—he or the untutored savage who wanders by the sea-shore, and sees God, the great spirit, in the sweep of the Atlantic wave, hears his voice in the roar of the thunder, and in the moaning of the forest blast—which? We say, in regard to this matter, the savage is far nearer the truth than the sage. He at least has not reasoned the throne of the universe vacant. He has not thrown himself, by his own mental acts, into a state of hopeless orphanage. He has kept his original principles and his native instincts, which point upwards to the Creator and to the better life. "He feels after God, if haply he may find him." Well, then, let us behold him now in the beauties, in the endless wealth, in the sweet wonders of the spring. "All his works praise him," but the works he is now working in such profusion around us sing to him the sweetest song of all the year. They sing it not only to him but to us. They tell us he is coming. They tell us he is near; that the living earth is a fair new robe of the living present God.

II.

The spring has not only this loud and general voice, as to God's existence and presence with us, it utters something more exact and definite as to his attributes and ways. Does it not, for instance, sing a clear *song of the divine faithfulness?*

Every spring is with God the keeping of covenant. "And the Lord said in his heart, I will not again curse the ground any more for man's sake; while the earth remaineth, seed-time and harvest, and cold and heat, and summer and winter, and day and night, shall not cease." That is the general promise, and how true he is in the keeping of it! He is, as it were, conducting an argument as to his own fidelity. The argument began when Noah came out of the ark, and it will end only at the judgment-day. The argument is increscent and cumulative. It grows in length and *strength* year by year. The green fields to-day make it stronger than ever it was before. It will be stronger next year than it is to-day, although to-day it is strong enough for the trust of all the world. Indeed, it was strong enough when it was made. All who know God know that his covenant of providence as well as of grace standeth sure. If the *providential* covenant were broken, the gracious one could not be fulfilled. But there is no sign of any breach anywhere. "Great is his faithfulness." The lengthening days are telling it, the birds are singing it, the flowers are blooming it, the whole earth is quick with it, and it breathes abroad in the balmy air.

Suppose there were a suspension of the course of the argument to which we are referring for one year—not a *breach* in the covenant, but for one season a mysterious pause in its fulfilment—God pledging himself to keep

men alive by *some* means, but withholding the spring. What a world this would then be! How dreary would be the sight! Not a blade of grass, not a green leaf, not a single flower! Nothing but the red earth, the bare rocks, the barren sands, the leafless trees! It would be like the laying out of nature for her funeral—like the silent and awful preparations for the last fires. But God who has promised is faithful. Let us who receive the fulfilment of the promise be grateful—grateful because, in shewing his faithfulness, he communicates his goodness.

III.

This is another of the voices of the season. It tells us clearly and constantly, and every day with louder voice, of *God's great goodness.* He brings the spring, not merely because he is faithful, but still more because he is good. It is not merely that he made a certain promise four thousand years ago, and *must* keep it. It is that he made the promise and *loves* to keep it. When he made it he knew that he would love to keep it. He is not so much like a merchant who has certain things written in his book and stands honourably to every engagement. He is rather a father with certain things written in his heart, who comes among his children every morning with an open hand. The chief joy of God's existence is goodness. The divine occupation for ever is, to give. "He giveth to all life and breath and

all things." And how constantly, and how lavishly, and how beautifully! Does any one doubt the goodness of God because he has a cross to bear, a burden to carry, shadows falling amid the sunshine, and pains among his pleasures? That doubt is rebuked by ten thousand gifts, each in its own voice and way telling the story of divine goodness. Every green field tells that God is good, and every tree in blossom, and every flower in bloom, and every blade of corn, and every rill in motion, and every bird in song, and every wandering cloud, and every lengthening day, and the soft piping winds, and the gentle showers—all these are either present gifts of God (in respect of the freshness and beauty of them they are present gifts), or they are the pledges and the germs of gifts and goodness for days yet to come.

IV.

As we speak thus of freshness and beauty, we seem to hear another voice of the season telling us softly and melodiously of *Divine Tenderness.*

Autumn declares, with perhaps still fuller voice than the spring, the divine goodness, but it does not speak so much of God's tenderness. God takes this season of the year to tell us especially what tenderness, what delicacy, what colourings of exquisite beauty, there are in his nature. Did God raise with his own hand that flower on its stem, with all those rich minglings of

colour? Then he must love beauty. Did he call out in the grass and in the buds and flowers that exceeding delicacy of texture, that softness almost ethereal, which will vanish if you touch it, which seems to quiver almost if you draw near? Then God must be very tender himself. You may say that these visible things can only be very faint shadows of the beauty and the tenderness of God. True; but they are real notwithstanding. They are thrown out from his real nature. In him are all the archetypes of beauty and all the fountains of tenderness; we may therefore commit ourselves and all we have into his keeping. The tenderest and dearest things we have we can bring to him—our wounded feelings, our trembling hopes, our brightest joys, our children when they are sick, or when they are seeking salvation, our own souls when they are all sensibility—all these we may bring to him whose mercy is *tender* mercy, whose kindness is *loving* kindness, who *pitieth* them that fear him, and who gives new proof of his tenderness, love, and pity every spring.

These are some of the voices of the spring concerning God. It tells us of his existence, his faithfulness, his goodness, his tender pity. But it has other voices which more concern ourselves—our states, duties, and prospects.

V.

It has a voice of good cheer to all who are serving God

faithfully, and seeking good ends for themselves or for others, although as yet with little apparent result. For *when* does it come? Immediately after the winter. The darkest, bleakest, deadest season of all the year is followed by the freshest and most reviving, as if to shew us every year anew that nothing is impossible with God. Sometimes the reign of winter is protracted, and the earth lies torpid and still beyond the time when she usually awakes. Then the spring comes rapidly. The frost breaks up, the wind shifts round to the south, the showers fall, and, amid the glints of the sunshine, the imprisoned vegetation rushes out on the sight. Almost every year there are some few days together when there is this clear, triumphant passing from the one season to the other. In such a time each day is like a joyous trumpet-cry, "Winter is dying—winter is dead! Summer is coming: the spring is here!"

Now all this, by analogy, tells us never to despair, never even to despond. It may be winter in the heart, or still more in the souls of others for whom we watch. It may seem as if the spiritual sensibilities were bound fast in the frost of sin, as if the very roots of piety were dead, and as if nothing more could be done to change a state of things so depressing. And yet what is the real state of the case? It may be that the seeds of truth were sown long ago; that they are *not* dead; that they are beginning to germinate and spring; that now

everything will be more effectual — means, mercies, afflictions—that the season for the soul has, so to speak, quite changed; that salvation will now be in the very air; that the winter is past; and that God, who renewed the face of the earth, will work now that higher work for the soul, of which the flowery spring is the fair symbol.

You will remember that touching incident in the journey of Mungo Park, the African traveller, when, way-worn and weary in the desert, surrounded by savages, destitute of help, he was ready to sink in despair, when his eye rested on a little tuft of green moss of extraordinary beauty. The fresh verdure of the little plant, cared for by God alone in the midst of the thirsty wilderness, revived his fainting spirit, and sent him on his way with new strength and courage. If that little flower saved his life, as it probably did, surely the blooming of all the flowers we see around us now might sometimes save our faith—might keep us from always muttering "winter, winter," as we go. "Lift up the hands which hang down, and strengthen the feeble knees." Our God cannot forget, cannot forsake. He needs the winter for souls to prepare for the spring; but he never forgets to bring the spring when the time has come. Let us toil on then, assured that in due season we shall reap if we faint not, and that God has *always* a spring after a winter.

VI.

The spring has another voice—*a voice which sounds away into the far future*, and foretells "the time of the restitution of all things." God, in renewing the face of the earth, seems to give us a visible picture and bright image of that blessed moral renovation which is coming in the fulness of the time. If you were in the country you could not fail to be struck with the universality of the vegetative power, and with its resistlessness. You would see it everywhere—climbing up to highest places, and blooming down in lowly dells, invading the most hidden spots, embracing with its green arms the roughest rocks, healing the scars of winter with its tenderness, claiming the whole landscape as its own! A type, I say, of the universality of the spring time of the world, when it comes. It will be everywhere. It will find out the lowliest spots of our humanity; it will glorify the commonest and poorest men, so that they will be beautiful and great. It will adorn those in highest station, and they will be humble and good. It will transform all peoples. It will heal all rents and scars of the long wintry time that is now passing, and girdle and embrace the world with the strength and beauty of a true spiritual life. "Awake, O north wind! and come, thou south; blow upon this great world-garden, that the spices thereof may flow forth." Then our

beloved will "come into his garden, and eat his pleasant fruits."

VII.

Another voice—giving announcement of the *general resurrection from the dead.*

When we look upon a vast landscape which before had been brown, sere, and leafless, breaking out into life which assumes a thousand forms, all of them beautiful, why should it seem a thing incredible with us that God should raise the dead? If God can clothe the bare branches of a whole forest of trees with green leaves to their very tops, and sprinkle the flowers around all their roots, until they shine out of shady places like stars, can he not, think you, as easily raise a human body? Do you say, "the trees were not dead, nor the flowers; they both had roots in the ground." Granted, but how do we know that the body is not rooted in the ground by its burial? Nay, how do we know that the resurrection body is not rooted already *in* the present body? It is quite possible that there is already some subtle element of life and power within this present body, held here in the meantime in a state of mysterious suspense and imprisonment, waiting until the outer material organization is dissolved in the grave, that it may come out into life. The apostle says that the death and burial of the body is like the sowing of grain—and ah! what a sowing of it there has been in all ages, and how

have all the fields of this world where it is sown been watered with mourners' tears! How have men gone forth everywhere, "weeping, bearing this precious seed!" But the spring-time is coming, the resurrection-day. And then the whole earth, and the great and wide sea, shall give back their buried treasures, and be like a field which the Lord hath blessed.

VIII.

Another voice (and this shall be the last) tells us that *all our earthly time is the spring season of our existence.*

The spring of the year is the proper time for cultivation. Now is the time for breaking up the ground, and casting in the seeds, for bending the pliant twig, and pruning away the wasteful offshoots. If nature is left alone, and especially in a country like this, she does not produce the fruits which are best adapted for the sustenance of man and beast, or she produces them in quite insufficient measure, and in much inferior quality. Nature left alone soon runs out into wildness. You must have the plough, the harrow, the spade, the pruning-hook; you must sow and plant at the right time, and then watch, and weed, and water, and train with unwearying care, or there will be no gathering or reaping, no joyous abundance of the harvest home.

In this respect, how like the soil of the earth is to the

heart of man! There is great force in the heart-soil—a power of immense fertility, but then, alas! there are seeds of evil latent which spring up immediately, without culture, covering the heart with weeds and plants of baleful shadow. Evil principles, dispositions, habits of the most gigantic and pernicious description, will spring up, without culture at all, and with a quickness and facility which ought to be very alarming to us. It does not require any effort to make a man self-willed, impatient, proud, envious, avaricious, carnal. If the seeds of these things are in him at all (and they are more or less in all men), they will grow easily, quickly, and in the end with a terrible strength—*if they are let alone.* But this season of the year comes to tell us *not* to let them alone, comes to tell us that we must be up and doing, and that we must claim the soil and take possession of it immediately for other and higher uses, as the seed-plot of sacred truths, as a garden of pure affections, as a field for the training of principles and virtues which are to bloom and grow in perfection in heaven.

And the soil of man is *such* a soil, that all good things *will* grow in it, by our own diligence and God's blessing. Let us not doubt this. Nor let us doubt that God's blessing will always be *equal* to our diligence, for "as a man soweth so shall he also reap." The season is all vocal and echoing with voices urging to diligence him who hath ears to hear.

Have any of you seen a sower in the fields this year, with measured step and liberal hand, casting out the precious seed? Does he not say to you, "It is the spring-time with the soul as with the earth; look to your fields—the hearts of your children—the homes of your neighbourhood; and, above all, to that home-walled garden, your own heart."

Have you seen a gardener engaged about your own flowers and plants? Does he not seem to say to you, "It is the spring, how stands that piece of sacred ground which only *you* can keep, which no hired hand can touch?" Or have you seen, not the work itself, but the *results* of it? the trees pruned, the flowers appearing above the soil, or the green blade of the corn—do not all these appearances, which are the fruit of labour, seem to speak to us? the bursting bud, the spreading leaf, the trim hedgerow, the blooming garden, the fields of wheat just touched all over with the tender green—do they not say, "Is the work of the season done with you, and are you doing it still every day?" Oh! in this highest sense let us all be co-workers with God. *He* is now renewing the face of the earth. He is now preparing in the natural world what will impart beauty to the summer, plenty to the autumn; what will fill men's hearts with food and gladness, even through the dark wintry days. Let us labour now, so that we may adorn our manhood, if we have not yet reached it, with beauty,

fill our decline of life with abundance, and have light and warmth even for the winter of death.

All our life in this respect is a spring. Every day we are sowing. And we must sow on to the end. When a child begins to fall into its first little habits and ways, you may say, "Behold a sower goes forth to sow." If a man lives a hundred years, he is a sower still; with palsied hand he is still dropping seed that will give him fruit in eternity. To a certain extent we are *reapers* too, but summer prime and harvest wealth are not here. The summer of our life, and the harvest of our toil, are away before us, and we must cross the brook called Death to reach them. There *is* a place where all good fruit is in garner, where all wages due will be paid, where all labourers will meet, where all sowers will have sheaves. Sow then to the Spirit, and ye shall reap life everlasting. Sow bountifully, and ye shall reap also bountifully. Sow beside all waters, and ye shall be the more "blessed."

You who are young, "in the morning sow your seed." You who are old, "in the evening withhold not your hand." You who observe the wind and forget to sow, cease to fret over circumstances, and put more strength to duty. You that sow in tears, sow on, weeping as you go forth, and ye shall reap in joy. It is spring-time with us all; and God, who is renewing the face of the earth, is ready to help us through all the

days of our toil, and pledged to reward us with eternal rest. Yes; and busy as he is to-day, through all the earth where spring has come, he cannot forget the feeblest worker in his vineyard. He would leave the forest without foliage, the field without grass, and the garden without a flower, sooner than one working, faithful soul, without grace to help in time of need.

Behold the Man.

Behold the man.—JOHN xix. 5.

THESE are the words of Pilate, the Roman governor, when he was striving, with some concern and anxiety —and yet with no profound sincerity—to secure the acquittal of Jesus, and his release from the malice and power of the Jews. He had been tried by the Sanhedrim, pronounced guilty of blasphemy, and delivered to Pilate to undergo the punishment of death. Pilate was fully persuaded of his innocence, and he sought, with as much earnestness as was consistent with the weakness and the vices of his character, to obtain his release. Part of his policy was to *degrade* Jesus in public estimation. In this way he would hope to abate the intense and animated hostility that was cherished by the rulers of the Jews. He scourged him as if he had been a malefactor; he suffered his soldiers to mock and make sport of him; "they platted a crown of thorns and put it on his head;" they put on him a purple robe; they hailed him in derision "*King of the Jews!*" Having thus, as he thought, stained his glory and flouted his fancied claims to royalty, he brought him forth, with bleeding

brow, with an aspect probably more meek and sorrowful than any he had yet worn, that the Jews might *see* that their fears were unfounded, and their hostility misplaced; and as he came forth he said, partly in ridicule, partly in pity, "*Behold the man!*"

Pilate himself had a deep feeling of involuntary respect, almost of fear, in regard to this innocent uncomplaining mysterious "man;" but his purpose of release would be attained if he could manage the acting of this drama so as to substitute in the minds of Christ's enemies *any lighter feelings* for those dark and diabolical ones which swayed them almost to madness now—if he could put contempt for hatred, pity for rage. The scheme, to be that of a timorous and time-serving man of the world, was not unwisely planned. It was perhaps as good a scheme as *could* have been devised on principles of worldly expediency. It had no basis of honest conviction; it wanted truth in the inward part; but if it be judged, not in the light which the great events have thrown on it, but according to the probabilities of the time, the conclusion would seem not at all unreasonable that Pilate has managed the matter well, and that as he flings out the opprobious exclamation—the mocking, pitying words, "Behold the man"—he may succeed in his object, and deliver him in whom he "found no fault." It was otherwise ordained. But, unwittingly, he uttered words which will never be forgotten. He gave to

preachers of the gospel one of their noblest texts. He became a preacher himself. As Balaam went to the mountain-top in Moab to launch upon Israel the malediction and the curse, but was compelled to shed blessing upon all her tents; so Pilate threw out his scoffing words just for the occasion, hardly thinking, perhaps, that they would be remembered on the morrow; and lo! they have been caught up into the revelation of God; they have been adopted by the children of men as expressive of their faith, admiration, and worship; and perchance they may be heard again in heaven, when Jesus shall be clothed in the robes of celestial royalty, crowned with many crowns, and throned amid a glory that shall never fade away.

How significant it is, when we think of it, that the mere passing words of a man of no moral worth should thus become instinct with higher and holier meaning!—should be, as it were, redeemed and turned to heavenly uses by simple contact with the person of Jesus. What a virtue there must be *in him*, when almost everything he touches is in some sense hallowed and glorified! Toil has been a nobler discipline since *he* wrought in Nazareth; common travel has had more pleasure in it since he trod the dusty highways of Judea; suffering has been a more sacred thing since *he* suffered; we could not now see a crown of thorns without thinking tenderly of him; and the cross he has changed from

being a symbol of shame into one of everlasting renown. This as to mere things. And then as to persons—"As many as touched him were made perfectly whole." "Whom he called, them he also justified; and whom he justified, them he also glorified."

Let us now "behold the man"—whom the world desired, whom the world crucified, whom the world will crown.

I.

Let us "behold the man" *whom the world desired.*—This is he of whom the prophet spake when he said, "Thus saith the Lord of Hosts, Yet once, it is a little while, and I will shake all nations, and *the desire of all nations shall come.*"

At the very moment of the fall, active preparations were begun for the advent and appearance of the deliverer; and, without the least intermission, these preparations had been continued. We all know in general what forms these preparations assumed: how the early promise of Eden was brightened and enlarged; how sacrifice was instituted at the very gates of Paradise; how patriarchal worship was set up; how a great system of type and shadow succeeded—almost every type pointing to him as the anti-type—every shadow to him as the substance; how the law—moral and ceremonial alike—became a schoolmaster leading on to Christ; how prophets foretold his sufferings and glory; how

kings bowed on their thrones before the majesty of the monarch of the future; and how all pious hearts were ever travelling forward in desire to the purity and the peace which he would shed in abundance over "the latter days." While thus instructing them so carefully in spiritual things, he was also conducting them *providentially*, and was making the lessons of their outward life—the mercies and the judgments, the wars and the captivities, the declensions and revivals of their national history — to co-operate and combine with the things more expressly gracious, in preparing a way for "the messenger of the covenant," and in preparing the mind and heart of the church—after many ages of eager longing—to give him, in his revealed personality, a loving and loyal welcome. Accordingly, we have a very chorus of song, and we see a grand procession of joyful worshippers at the opening of the New Testament history. The angels greet him from heaven; the shepherds from the peaceful plains. Simeon and Anna from the Temple; the wise men from the far east—these had all been waiting (more or less consciously) for the consolation of Israel, and they all "rejoiced for the consolation" when it came. In the outer world, also, God was working by his providence, and, we doubt not, by his spirit too, to prepare the *nations* for the coming of his son. The process of preparation *in the world*, as distinguished from the church, was darker

and more sad; and it is not so easy for us, at any one time, to tell its precise character, or mark the stages of its progress. We are amazed by the number and complexity of the historical events; we behold a succession of rising and falling monarchies, a series of dreadful battles, the building and the burning of cities, the horrors of idolatry, the terrors of superstition—in one word, constant strange movement, the world ever "tossing to and fro," but never to any "dawning of the day." It may seem to us sometimes that there is nothing in heathen history before the time of Christ that indicates a tendency or a progress of human nature towards anything good—that in those dark and distant centuries we shall find nothing but the pressure of the curse, and bitter streams of misery and sin. On the contrary, I think it may be made out, and that in fact it has been made out by one class of Christian writers, that there are indications, numerous and significant enough, to manifest *a tendency* of human nature—enough to shew which way the great current of human thought and experience was slowly running, and to testify and tell us that man, *as man*, was feeling more deeply as time rolled on the moral hopelessness of his condition without direct celestial help, and that he was looking onwards and upwards with a more impassioned, expecting, perhaps sometimes also despairing look, to see if help was not at hand.

It is not meant to assert that the great *masses* of men in any age were powerfully affected with moral dissatisfaction, or anything like spiritual longing for a Redeemer. Involved as they were in the darkest ignorance, sunk in moral stupefaction, "sold under sin," *they* had but a dull sense of misery, and knew not how to tell it—but a vague and dim idea of what would bring relief, and hardly knew how to raise a desire in longing for it. Yet every age has had its interpreters—men endowed with knowledge, genius, sensibility—who, while thinking only of themselves, gave voice to the sorrows of the multitude, and sent up the unuttered yearnings of a people into a mighty cry. Certainly there were always *souls*, if not nations, on the outlook for a Saviour. Raised by their intelligence or by their susceptibilities to the watch-towers of the world, they stood gazing wistfully into the future, to catch any rays shed from the person of the descending monarch that might be stealing in upon the darkness, and listening through the world's night-watches if perchance they might hear the stillness broken by the notes of preparation as he drew near. There was thus a yearning for deliverance, a longing in the hearts of men for relief, and liberty, and higher life—for recovery of long-lost fellowships, and for returning presence of God. Some of them felt the awful bondage of sin, and after ineffectual attempts to shake it off, groaned as beneath the iron hand of relentless fate.

Some drew pictures of beauty, and strove to attain the deepest intuitions of wisdom; but the beauty always vanished in the storms, and the wisdom was mocked and baffled amid the perplexities and mysteries of life. Others, beholding the vanity and evanescence of mortal things, concluded that the very substance of human life was nothing more than shadows and dreams. Mourners stood trembling and weeping by the grave, and, unable to penetrate its secrets or dispel its gloom, longed to end all questionings by plunging into its darkness, and thought "nothing so happy as an early death." While some, in loftier and more awful mood, looked away beyond the shores of time, straining their sight to catch, if they might, the faintest outline or shadow of "everlasting hills," and listened for any murmurings of life which might be overflowing from the land of immortality. Now, while these things are very affecting, they are also deeply instructive. They shew us how the human race, amid its bootless struggles and grievous disappointments, was being silently and effectually prepared for the advent of the true Conqueror, the great Revealer, the appointed Redeemer of mankind. Then, in the fulness of time, *he* comes to answer the world's questionings, to relieve its sorrows, to meet its deepest wants. He comes with blood of a perfect sacrifice for sin! with healing and restoring grace for our fallen nature! with perfect purity and beauty in his own life

for contemplation! with unspeakable sympathy and tenderness, to melt, to strengthen, to console! with good news from heaven; with the key of death that lets us in to it; with immense revelations of the future; —in one word, he comes as God's living answer to the world's unconscious prayer. "Behold the man" whom all other men in their best moments were yearning for and inly pining to see! It was as though there had been carried forward in the heart of humanity some broken but tender reminiscences of Eden, which, like the sweetest of childhood's memories with us, would not be extinguished nor worn away. The world felt that it *had* been better once, that light must have shone over its morning prime, that there had been a golden *day*, if not a golden age. Thus moved by inextinguishable instincts, it sang of the past, sighed for the past to be again, and so waited for a better future which would recover its lost glories and catch up its suspended life.

As one who in early years has been separated, he knows not how, from father and mother, yet fills all his life with their presence, and is ever striving to recall and realize more perfectly what they were in form and image, and what their love and care to him, and *starts* sometimes when the chords of association are suddenly struck, as the song of a bird, the sight of a flower, the waving of a tree, or the murmur of a brook, recalls and revivifies some scene that was filled with their presence—

so we believe this world carried in its heart the deathless reminiscences of its first days, and like an orphaned child, was ever turning to look for vanished faces and withered scenes—was thinking as it could of the perfect man, the perfect woman, the perfect home, and of that superior presence now so sadly lost which glorified all! "Behold the man" who comes not to destroy but to fulfil—not to tell the world that all its memories, loves, and longings, are sinful and vain; but to end and give repose to them all in his own person, character, and work. Behold the man who comes not to make a little enclosed Eden *in* earth again, but to plant a garden for God, wherever the air is breathing, and the sun is shedding his rays. Not to be in life and nature a mere repetition of the *first* man—frail although fair, and fallible although free—but to develope the deeper purposes of divine love; to unfold the true plan of progress and perfection for man; to be monarch, teacher, priest, for ever; to be more to us than Adam, if he had stood, could ever have been; to be "the *second man, the Lord from Heaven.*"

How strange then that we have to say, secondly,

II.

"Behold the man" *whom the world crucified*—for the world *did* crucify Jesus Christ—not the world as dis-

tinguished from the church, but *humanity* as embracing the church. If ever there was an act in which this whole world was united, the crucifixion of the Son of God was that act. It was not an accident, it was not done hastily, it was not done in a corner. The *world* did it—in accordance with "the determinate council and foreknowledge of God," but yet as the fair outcome and expression of its moral dispositions, and its spiritual state *before God.* The act is far too stupendous and significant to be laid upon one man, or upon one class, or even upon one nation. It was not Judas, who betrayed him; it was not the Sanhedrim, which condemned him to death; nor Pilate, who gave him up to die against his better judgment; nor the Roman soldiers, who nailed him to the cross; nor the trembling disciples, who all forsook him and fled;—it was not the Jews, it was not the Gentiles *alone* who are chargeable with the responsibility of this solemn awful deed. It was the whole world, which had been desiring his coming, which *crucified* him when he came, and not only the world as then living, but the former ages, and the succeeding ones. All nations and all ages were represented in that solemn drama. You and I were there. It is because we feel that we were on Calvary in fair and just representation 1800 years ago, that we so love now to revisit the place in thought, and to linger around it in sorrow and prayer. What were Calvary to us more than any other mountain, what "the

decease" of Jesus more than any other death, if we did not feel that there are relationships between our souls and *that* event, far more important than those which connect us with any other?

We now behold, then, this strange but most instructive spectacle—the very same world, which had been yearning for deliverance and for a *Redeemer*, rejecting and crucifying the Saviour when he came. It was not without a struggle that it was done; there were many relentings and misgivings, just as there are now to men when they sin. In following the steps of his pilgrimage and ministry, we sometimes think that the world is going to open its heart and receive him at once. "Jesus," in his youth, we read, "increased in wisdom and stature, and in favour with God *and man;*" multitudes followed him during the course of his ministry in gratitude and hope; they wondered at his gracious words, talked of his miracles in every house, pressed around him to hear his voice or to feel his touch; they strewed his path with the triumphant palm, until the way into Jerusalem was all glowing with green; the children sang their simple hosannas—an excellent sign of the parents' feeling; and we feel as though this world might soon and easily be his, without bloody sweat, night agonies, "strong crying and tears"—without Gethsemane, without the bitter cross.

But ah, how fallacious such appearances! The

world, thus put on its solemn trial, failed to prove itself true, and brought out before other worlds the most conclusive proof of its depravity and guilt. Pilate said of a sinless, perfect being, "*Behold the man!*" and the world, beholding him—or not able truly to behold him—put him to death. "The light shone in the darkness, and the darkness comprehended it not." One who "did no sin, neither was guile found in his mouth;" who missed no opportunity of doing good and glorifying God—was not suffered to live. There was much to attract in his life and character, but, as the event proved, there was more to repel; and humanity, which had fallen before in the first Adam, fell again just before it rose in the *second*. There was a fair trial, there was a decisive issue, and our verdict, in view of that issue, against ourselves and our fellow-creatures, should be, "Guilty of the death of the man Christ Jesus; guilty, therefore, of possessing those evil dispositions and that depraved nature which led to such an issue; guilty of not loving God; guilty of not knowing his Son; guilty of saying, This is the heir, come let us kill him, and the inheritance shall be ours!" This one scene, we hold, is enough to condemn the race, and to justify the strong language of the apostle, when he says, that "*every* mouth must be stopped, and *all the world* become guilty before God."

If there had been no wars, no slavery, no social wrongs, no religious persecutions. no flagrant moral

delinquencies lying darkly along all the line of human history—here is one act, the deliberate repudiation of perfect goodness in a human character, which clearly shews that our sympathy with that goodness has been vitally affected, disturbed, and broken, beyond *our* power of correction and cure. Christ was "the desire of all nations" before he came, and that proved that man had not fallen into an irretrievable degradation—that seeds and elements of good were working in him still, and that the great Father was not forgetful of his prodigal children. Christ was the *rejected* of all nations when he came, and *this* proved that our fall was not a temporary and a trifling circumstance, but that it had rent the most sacred bonds, and filled human nature with guilt and sin.

But oh the depth of the riches, both of the wisdom and knowledge of God; how unsearchable are his judgments, and his ways past finding out—until he reveals them! The world crucified his Son, and he made that very crucifixion the means of the world's life. In his death, still more than in his life, Jesus was set for the fall and for the *rising again* of many in Israel. The same event which proved the sinfulness of our nature as nothing had ever proved it before, turned full upon the world in sudden revelation the love and mercy of God; and what to our natural judgment would have seemed the most impregnable of barriers in the way of

our return to God, was made the means of our repentance, and the gate of everlasting life. Dark and dreary seemed the prospects of this world, in the merely human view of them, when Jesus went up Calvary. "All who beheld these things smote their breasts and returned." Every pious heart was darkened with dismay. Truth, goodness, love, beauty—all gone from earth—driven away in a very storm of passion, and by new acts of guilt—what hope can there be for man now? What possibility of the elevation of a world so indocile, so impenitent, and so desperately wicked? But out of the very darkness shootings and gleamings of light soon went abroad. As the sun shone out again after brief eclipse, God's boundless love broke forth in clearer shinings, with richer airs, along fuller streams of blessing. In the great sacrifice of the cross the Saviour drank up the very guilt of crucifixion, and proclaimed a universal amnesty to the transgressors. He vindicated divine righteousness while proclaiming divine mercy; he honoured the law while making the gospel. He fulfilled the types when he shewed himself in the death-act as the great antitype; and while dispersing the shadows and bidding them all away, he revealed the unchanging substance and the everlasting truth.

What a thrilling moment is that in Joseph's history when he makes himself known to his brethren! "His brethren could not answer him; for they were troubled

at his presence. And Joseph said unto his brethren, Come near to me, I pray you. And they came near. And he said, I am Joseph, your brother, whom ye sold into Egypt. Now, therefore, be not grieved or angry with yourselves that ye sold me hither; for God did send me before you to preserve life." So Jesus turns round from Calvary upon a despairing world, and says, "Be of good cheer; for God is sending me before you to preserve life. 'Tis true that you have sold me; 'tis far more true that I have given myself—(I have power to lay down my life, and I have power to take it again);—'tis true I have been betrayed of man, but 'tis far more true that I am sent of God; and the world that has rejected me to-day will accept me with tears and gladness when the world knows all that this day means." Yes, and so it has proved to be; when the Saviour cried "*It is finished,*" regarding heaven's work, earth began to feel that its enmity and estrangement must be finished too. And ever since, the healing and harmonizing power has been coming from the cross. "There is balm in Gilead, there is a physician there." "As many as touch him," by faith, "are made perfectly whole." "We preach Christ *crucified.*" We have redemption through his blood. We cry, "Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world!"

And *this* is the message which more than any other goes thrilling to the world's heart—the message, namely

concerning *sin*. "He hath put away sin by the sacrifice of himself"—that one sentence goes more deeply into a guilty man's experience, takes faster hold of his conscience, and then of his affections, than all that could be said to him of truth, and duty, and reward. Truth might be felt to be true, but it would not be attainable; duty would be felt to be binding, but it would not be an easy yoke; heaven would seem fair, but the way to it would never be found; for still this terrible thing *sin*, throbbing and aching in the heart, would darken and embitter all. This, then, was the one thing more wanting—that the Redeemer of man should be able to deal expressly and decisively with sin, and this the cross enabled him to do. He *died* for our sins according to the Scriptures; less than *Christ crucified* would have been far too little to go out with for the conversion of the world. Christ teaching, Christ loving, Christ weeping, Christ praying—all these are most sacred, and can never, in this world or the next, perish from the memory of men; but all these would not have been enough for the healing and recovery of lost men if they had not led on to *Christ crucified*;—*that* touches the core of the malady; *that* springs the hidden secret; that startles, overwhelms—then melts and wins and conquers.

The cross was, on earth at least, the last and fullest expression of his own perfection and his Father's love.

It was the meeting-place of the divine attributes. It published eternal counsels. It was the vindication of justice. It was the gate of mercy, the brightest auspice of hope, the destruction of sin, the comfort of sorrow, the strength of weakness, the spring of duty, the source of all gracious help, the beginning of everlasting glory. By *this* he goes forth conquering and to conquer, and the cross will bring the crown.

III.

"Behold the man" *whom the world will crown. Heaven* has crowned him already. "He endured the cross, despising the shame, and is set down at the right hand of the throne of God." Not only is *he* a throned monarch there, but crowns in abundance are cast at his feet, and hymns of praise from angels and from ransomed men are for ever floating up into his ear. The royalties of heaven are held in willing subjection to his supreme authority. The kings and nations of the great universe above do bring their honour and glory into the celestial city where he abides, and no mutinous murmur ever mingles with the ascriptions of loyalty there, and no tongue is ever silent when "with a loud voice" they sing the new song—"Worthy is the Lamb that was slain to receive power, and riches, and strength, and honour, and glory, and blessing!"

But earth must crown him too. And she will. He must be honoured in the very scene of his humiliation.

He must gather joys where he sowed tears and sufferings. He must claim a kingdom where he shed his blood. And the kingdom will be given to him—the crowns of all the earth will be laid at his feet. And not a murmur of dissent will be heard from shore to shore as he ascends into the throne of the world, and proclamation is made through every land that "the kingdoms of this world are become the kingdoms of our God and of his Christ."

We neither know exactly *how* nor *when* this great result is to be brought about; the times and the seasons, the modes and the issues of things, are reserved in the Father's power. Judging from the analogies, it seems improbable that any one should be able to draw a map of the future with clearer figures and sharper lines than those of that grand but somewhat dim prophetic map that lies before us all. As the crucifying was expected by none—came upon the very church by surprise—so the *crowning* may be preceded and attended by circumstances differing in some respects from *any* of the anticipations of the pious.

But what of that? If I cannot tell the length of the prophetic days, am I to hope or labour any the less earnestly for that blessed day of millennial peace and joy which, *when* they have elapsed, will come? If I cannot interpret aright the sound of one angel's trumpet, am I not to speed "another angel who flies in the midst of

heaven, having the everlasting gospel to preach unto them that dwell on the earth?" If I cannot throw light upon dim and mysterious apocalyptic visions, must I not regale my sight with the vision of a regenerated earth, and feast by anticipation on the beauties of Paradise regained? If I cannot foretell the personal movements of my Lord and King, and whether he will appear on earth *before* the notes of the last triumph are rung, am I therefore not to fight as a good soldier of his? and may I not also, in some intervals of the battle, be trying to sound among my fellow-soldiers some prelude of the victor's song?

Brethren, there is to us—there is to us all—*one* grand prophecy which finds consistent and continuous expression in the Scriptures, from the first announcement of grace in Eden, when it was promised that the seed of *the woman* should bruise the serpent's head, to the last utterance of revelation which goes sounding in royal claim over all the future. This grand prophecy is expressed now and again in strong and clear words—words which are like inscriptions on the banners of the Christian host, foretelling the issue of the battle; words which flash like the light of torches against a sombre sky, or steal like the light of morning along the mountain-tops.

But the prophecy breathes along the whole line of revelation, and breaks out in those particular expres-

sions because revelation is so full of it that it overflows. *The gospel itself is the prediction of its ultimate success.* Jesus himself is the guarantee for the coming sovereignty. "Behold the man," and you will not doubt the royalty. See him as he is, and this world will seem to lie as a kingdom at his feet! Or, behold this world as it is, and let its aspirations and its sorrows have sympathy from your heart; and you will feel instinctively that none but HE can win the long vacant place, brighten the faded pictures, restore the lost ideal, and take away the sin, the shame, the sorrow, which the world in its restlessness knows not where to lay. When we live truly, we have little doubt of a happy future. 'Tis only when we live falsely, meanly—below our profession—below our faith—that the future is overcast with uncertainty and gloom.

Brethren, let us live near to Christ, and then we shall see clearly, as with prophet's gaze, into the far future. Beyond the driving clouds we shall see the mild splendours. Beyond the smoke and dust of battle we shall see the fruitful and far-stretching plains of peace. While casting in the precious seed, and helping with our faith and prayer those who go to sow it in distant fields, we shall think with joy of the reaping, the garnerage, and the harvest-home. While telling the story of the cross, in the actions and by the spirit of a consecrated life, we shall have many a vision of the crown; then,

among all the certainties of the future, none will seem more bright and clear to us than this, that for him who was "the desire of all nations" before he appeared, and who was crucified when he came, there is *yet* to come a regal triumph and a coronation-day.

The House of Many Mansions.

In my Father's house are many mansions, if it were not so I would have told you.—JOHN XIV. 2.

THESE are parting words, spoken by Jesus when he was "going away." And they are intended to be words of especial comfort for the healing and strengthening of sorrowful hearts. The parting *must* come. He does not for a moment hint that that is not to be. He speaks of it as the surest of appointed things—but, with a tenderness of forecasting love which has never been paralleled on earth, he strives to lift their thought and hope away beyond the mere act of severance to some of its blessed consequences both in this world and the next. And his thoughts and his language are so full of tenderness and beauty, and withal so large and so prospective, that it is impossible not to believe that he was looking far beyond the man and the sorrows of that hour, and opening springs of consolation to flow along the ages, that all mourners having faith in him might have comfort.

The comfort imparted in the text, as you will see, is connected especially with the other world. It is drawn

out of that future world. The sorrow is here, the fountain-head of the consolation is up yonder, and we are bid look up to the place whence it flows. "In my Father's house are many mansions." Thus we see that the whole manner and quality of the Christian consolation is different from that "which the world giveth." When the heart is yet bleeding from the stroke of some recent separation, "the world" whispers—bear up! bear up! think not of it! time will heal! other friends will gather around! the duties and the pleasures of life will occupy and interest the mind once more, and ere long the winter of grief and sorrow will be gone! Christ says, "Think of it! think of it deeply and well. "Know ye what I have done to you?" Look at the event in all its known relations and issues. Follow the departed in your thought—resolutely—as Elisha followed Elijah, saying, "As the Lord liveth, and as thy soul liveth, I will not leave thee." Follow until the gloom and the silence and the seeming emptiness of death, all give place to the apparency and reality and brightness of that better world, which is enriching itself so often and so much by the losses and the sorrows of this. "In my Father's house are many mansions."

I.

Vastness.—From these words we learn the vastness and the magnitude of heaven. His going away would

naturally seem to them pure loss without almost any compensation. Death, as a natural event, always seems so. The mind working by its own powers, and on its own knowledge simply, does not see death as a transference, a removal to another place without loss of essential being. In itself, it is like perishing; the dust is known to return to the dust, and the first and natural feeling is that the animating spirit has returned to the oblivion out of which it came. In a Christian country this is seldom the professed faith, yet in many cases it is the real feeling. For a while death seems only like a darkening, like a closing in, like an act of dread and mysterious extinction. It is hard and difficult, and to a deep mourner for a while almost impossible to think that the real life is unbroken; that the chain of it runs on; that the oppressive silence of the house, or room, out of which so much life has passed is the cause, or at least the immediate antecedent, of speech, and smile, and joyous activity elsewhere. But what says Christ in those words? Death is not a closing so much as an opening—not a falling so much as a rising—not a going away so much as a coming home. It is the passing of a pilgrim from one mansion to another, from the winter to the summer residence, from one of the outlying provinces up nearer the central home. "In my Father's house are many mansions." This is not a *chance* expression, far less a mere figure of speech. There are

many other expressions quite as large. We read of the *third* heavens, as if there were heavens above heavens, and again heavens above those. We read of Christ having "passed through all heavens" on his upward way, "that he might fill all things." And of "heaven, even the heaven of heavens," a place evidently spoken of as being of inconceivable grandeur and largeness, for it is said that *even* that cannot contain the infinite presence of God.

Now, this idea of largeness, of immense capacity and extent, is a real relief from some of the more popular conceptions of the future life. We think of gathering together in "a great multitude;" of standing in a throng, worshipping in a temple; of always beholding the Saviour; of always standing near to him in place; of being literally and, in the narrowest sense locally, "*with Christ*" for ever. Now, unquestionably these, and the like expressions, being scriptural, are most valuable, and in many ways helpful to our languid conceptions. But they are very capable of narrow and poor interpretation. Holding by them in their literality, we find our ideas contracting. We need the corrective and expansive influence of those *other* expressions—also scriptural—which carry our thoughts away beyond all narrow limits into the vastness and variousness of celestial life —"In my Father's house are many mansions."

The population of this world is something tre-

mendous. It has always been large. It has been yielding immense numbers to heaven in every age. Infants, believers, devout heathens possibly, accepted in a Saviour whose name they never heard. Thus "a great multitude which no man can number," has been passing in ceaseless procession through the valley of the shadow of death to the happy regions beyond. And that procession will continue to flow on, more deeply, more widely, more rapidly, as the ages come and go. As we think of this, we cannot help wondering *how* they are all to be provided for! where and how they are all to live! Well, the text tells us that ample provision is already made; that there is no crowding in God's infinite space; that there is room for all who go thither; that "In the Father's house are many mansions."

II.

Variety.—Out of the idea of vastness arises almost necessarily the idea of an endless variety. At least it is so in this world. And surely we must not think of heaven as less than earth. The variety existing in God's works here is one of the principal charms of the natural world. Not only has every country in the globe its distinctive qualities and natural productions, but within any one country what variety exists! In the land of our birth, without crossing any sea, we can find the region of perpetual snow, and some favoured

spots where the flowers never die; ruggedness in one place, beauty in another; productiveness here, sterility there; and a never-ending variety running through the whole. Not two faces in all the world, nor two trees, nor two flowers, nor two blades of grass, could be pronounced exactly alike. Then, I think we are almost bound to apply the analogy to the future life, and to believe that as there are "many mansions," so the furnishing and adorning of them will be very various. One will not be as another. There will not only be *room* for all, but *interest* for all. We do not go to heaven to lose our natural tastes, our sinless preferences, our peculiar desires, but rather to have all these drawn out, exercised, gratified, in a far higher degree. Would you think of the "many mansions"—that is, of vast realms of celestial space as filled up only with *one kind* of life? Then it would follow that heaven is to be a plainer, and a poorer, and a less interesting place than this earth. And unless our own nature were pressed down into some kind of mechanical exactness and shape, weariness would ensue. There would be a sighing for the lost seasons of the earth, and for its withered flowers, and for its light and shade, and for its many countries, and for its encircling seas. But no! There will be places, pursuits, occupations, and enjoyments for all. The "many mansions," we may be sure, contain many many modes, and ways, and powers, and possibilities,

and scenes—all united by a principle of sacred harmony, and yet furnishing endless and beautiful exemplifications of the beneficent law of *variety*, which, in so far as our observation extends, pertains to all the works of God. You sometimes hear it said—"But we must all meet in heaven!" And for the purpose of the speaker the sentiment is generally true, *i.e.*, we must all lay aside our unchristian antipathies there! no uncharitableness! no evil-speaking! no evil-thinking! no denominational badges! Love! perfect love! the love of God, of angels, of ransomed men! But is it necessary for the fulfilment of the promises of Scripture, and the glory of Christ, that we should literally "all *meet* in heaven!" that is, to live together, as men live together here? It really does not appear to be. That there will be meetings—oh yes, glad exultant meetings there, of death-severed souls—is past a doubt. The earthly relations will all be *acknowledged*, although many of them will not be perpetuated. Pastors will have "joy, and crown of rejoicing in their people;" and parents a song of wondrous gratitude for the salvation of every ransomed child! And sister will grasp brother's hand or sister's hand again; and husband and wife, no longer married or given in marriage to each other, will be devoted alike in the espousals of eternal love to the husband of the Church! But there will not only be all these *meetings*, but surely many partings also—not, indeed,

like the partings of earth, shadowed so much with solemn uncertainties, often precursors of death—but partings of joy, to be succeeded by many meetings; partings for the increase of happiness; partings for the filling of the universe; partings for the replenishing of the "many mansions of the Father's house"—each "going to his own place," to his "own company," to his own adopted pursuits and enjoyments, while thus all the more glory comes to him who has planned and "prepared" the whole.

III.

Homeliness.—Then, lest this vastness and variety should seem too large to our thought and too destructive of our ordinary earthly experience, we have also in these words a sweet assurance as to the *Homeliness* of heaven. For our Saviour speaks of it as his "Father's house;" and *his* Father is *our* Father, his God is *our* God. Hardly is there another word in the Bible that draws us up with so sweet a charm as this. *Our Father's house!* One of the first things of which we become conscious in this world is—home. It grows and clings around us with multiplied associations and deepening spell during all our growing years. To leave it is to young man or maiden sometimes like the pangs of death. To turn to it again in thought and desire from scenes of change and strife, or from the shores of a distant land, is like the daily bread of the heart, a part of religion itself. To

come home again after absence—either in health and joy, laden with the fruits of prosperity; or wearied, and baffled, and sick, and dying—is the very instinct of the soul. Home! the soldier thinks of it on the battle-field, and the sailor on the stormy sea, and the traveller amid the strange scenes of a foreign land, and many a stricken man in the fever-ward of the hospital, and many a lonely wanderer of the street, and many a criminal in the jail. Visions of its freshness and purity come floating around some men all their life long; and follow them whithersoever they go. Sometimes, when they have gone all the allotted way, and the end is coming fast, they go back again in memory, and with instinctive and mysterious love, to the home of childhood, and its tender sunshine and its sweet shade come flickering over the dying bed, and often amid these simple hallowed thoughts the dying comes. The strifes and the honours of manhood are all forgotten, and the thirsty home-sick soul must drink at the fountains of the youthful time, and see in that light of heaven "that lies about us in our infancy," and so fall asleep like a child unknowingly, rocked by a loving hand, in the cradle of death. Thus full many a time the first home becomes the type and the very threshold of the highest and the best. The wearied soul in its dreams and yearnings is seeking the first home, groping through the shadows of death to find the door, and looking for father's or

mother's face, when lo! there is the glow and warmth of the heavenly "House," and chanting in the air the music of the new song, and the sweet light of the perfect love on every face, and for the new comer the encircling of the everlasting arms! Oh sweet sleep of death that has such glad awaking! Happy close of life's day, whether it has been spent in storm or calm, if it brings us safely within the portals of that house from which we shall go no more out.

John Foster speculated, and wondered, and but for his faith he would have *trembled* at death. Many Christian writers speak of it habitually as a great and awful change. So it is in its issues, but then truly these issues are the issues of life and not of death. We are shaping these issues now, just as the spring is shaping all its buds, and forming and colouring the flowers that shall bloom during the summer day. We are making character. We are making heaven. We are making hell. If we are living well, as the servants of him whose words we are considering to-day, then we are expressly told by him not to be troubled about the end of life, about the going away of our friends, or about our own departure; not to invest death with gloom and awfulness, but to think of it as "falling asleep," "resting from our labour," being "received" by the Master, and, most chiefly, as entering the place prepared, the long waiting home. It will not be at all surprising if our

friends who are already gathered within the Father's house —happier far than we who mourn for them, and thoughtlessly wish them back in exile again with ourselves—if they, knowing and feeling now, at least in a large measure, what heaven really is, are filled with wonder and gladness in the sense of its *homeliness;* and if they are almost conscious of pity for the bootless toil of those who strain their thought and swell their imagery to picture it as *all* splendour and sublimity, while, it may be, the common life of heaven, just like the sweetest of what we call our common days on earth, is made up of gentleness and tenderness and love.

IV.

Reality.—The last thought we draw from this passage is the reality, *the certainty,* of all this—the firm, changeless certainty of that blessed future life into which our Lord and our departed friends have gone. Perhaps, according to systematic arrangement, this thought ought to have come sooner. The reality of the future life would seem to be the first thing, then its characteristics. But as a matter of fact our doubts do not wait on our reason. Doubts regarding immortality especially may rise at any time. They are very apt to brood amid darkening providences, or to spring out of exhausted feelings, or to come in as by surprisal after happy moments, or even after clear and strong acts of

faith. An assurance like this, therefore, is always seasonable, "If it were not so, I would have told you." And what a strength there is in the assurance as coming from him! "I would have told you. You know I would. You know how true I have been with you in every thing; how little I have spared your feelings when it has been necessary to wound them; how little I have regarded your mistaken expectations, and even your strongest wishes, when they have stood in the way of the revelation and accomplishment of my own plan! I have told you always whatever you have needed to know, and most certainly I would have told you long ago if *this* were not so—if there were no happy future life."

This life in itself is shadowy enough. Almost instinctively sometimes we take up the language of the Psalmist, and say, "Every man walketh in a vain show." "What is our life?" "It is even as a vapour which appeareth for a little time and then vanisheth away." Few things are more beautiful than the "vapour"—touched with the morning sun, and floating up the mountain-side into the higher air. But ah, how transient! The "vanishing" goes on as you gaze; and in a few fleeting moments it has melted away. So our whole time here is indeed "a *little* time." We speak of "long days," and of "long years." But when the awakened immortal soul looks at those spaces of time in the light of its own eternity, how

short and how shadowy they seem! In a season of deep sorrow long years of happiness dwindle to a point; while the very facts of our personal history, and the most substantial things we have attained, gleam and flit in our view like melting shadows. In those times we feel that everything depends on the reality and permanence of the *future* life! No man who has not long been untrue to himself and to his God can be pleased with the thought of annihilation. The prospect of a dreamless oblivion never can be welcome to a *living* soul. Even the thought of the progress of humanity and of the world could be no compensation to a living soul for its own extinction. A man who *possesses* his manhood *never* can relinquish it, but with agony and cry. In proportion as he really lives he looks for a realm of life where the good is not stained and mingled with evil, and where corruption and decay do not melt everything from sight. But who can tell him firmly *where* lies that realm of life, or whether anywhere? He asks philosophy, and she answers, "I see something like it, but I cannot surely tell. It may be land, or it may be cloud. It may be eternal life, or it may be a life like this—appearing for a little time, and then vanishing away." He asks his own reason, and those instincts of the heart which are stronger than reason itself, and they answer "yes" to-day and "no" to-morrow, according to the moods of the mind, and according to the aspects of out-

ward life. Then turning to Jesus Christ he asks—asks by his sorrow, asks by his hopes, asks by all the struggling instincts that *will* not die, asks by that upward look in which the soul is "seeking a city with foundations," whether such a city is builded—whether such a life is secure. And this is the answer—"If it were not so I would have told you; I go to prepare a place for you."

Precious words! let every mourner cling to them as the very tie that binds him with inseparable links to the dearest of his vanished friends. Let every unwilling sceptic take them as God's provided salvation from his doubts. Let every heaven-bound pilgrim see them written as with the first golden beams of the morning, always on the farthest horizon of his view. And let those who feel that their pilgrimage is drawing to a close, and who look wistfully, and sometimes in vain, for a clear outline of the better country to which they are going, *rest themselves* on such a text as this, until strength is recruited, and the clouds pass over, and they can go "on their way"—if not "rejoicing," at least in peace.

The love of heaven has been derided by some as a selfish passion, and as not worthy to be the chief aim and last end of brave and noble spirits. No doubt heaven *may* be represented and desired by the mind as a sensual paradise, a place of escape from conflict, of mere ignoble rest. But if we take it just as it is pro-

jected to our view in the Scriptures—in its relations to earthly labour, and suffering, and desire; and as the place where our higher toils and nobler enjoyments shall begin; and where the seeds of immortal life and glory shall spring into blossom, and grow towards the rich ripe fruitage of the far future time—then the desire of heaven is the noblest and purest passion we cherish. It is the desire to see what our highest faculties have been *made* to perceive and comprehend; to do a work suited to the energies of an immortal nature when they shall be all purified and refreshed with grace; to be what our hearts, in their divinest moments, are longing for. It is the acceptance of God's ideal plan of life as ours. It is the race of our spirits to their proper goal—the flight of our souls to home and rest.

Thus we not only justify the love of heaven and the journey to it, but, on the same grounds, we necessarily condemn while we also sorrow over the life that is animated by another spirit. How utterly deceived and blind is he who will not recognise with any seriousness, or to any purpose, the lapse of the years, the coming of the sorrows, and the inevitable ending of his own life ere long! Every thing great and strong is against such a life. Human experiences, natural agencies, laws of eternity, are all running the other way. Time, and death, and sin (and, high over all, God) are against you, and will float and carry you away as easily as the river

in flood carries the straw or the bubble on its bosom. Speak to the earth that she turn no longer eastward, but westward on her axis. Tell the sun to shine by night as well as by day. Banish winter from our island, and make it green and flowery all the year. Abolish poverty, stay the ravages of disease, and pluck the mower's scythe from the hand of death! You can do any one of these things as easily as you can stay or even modify the action of that law, by which you are written in heaven's book a dying man. And yet here you are perhaps struggling with providence, evading the thought of death, contradicting God. You are striving to perpetuate sensations, to accumulate property, to rise higher up, to be greater and happier and more settled here! You are striving for an earthly heaven, for immortality without death, and for a poor carnal perfection without inward discipline or heavenly grace. Think! Stay for a few moments in these bootless toils, and think how soon it will be "the father's house," or the prison of the universe as your spirit's home. Think how the germ of heaven or of hell are already within you. Think, and listen to the home-call, and come with the children, who like yourself perhaps, long wandered, but are now hastening homewards at the Father's call.

THE END.

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